Linze Schaap · Harry Daemen (Eds.)

Renewal in European Local Democracies

Puzzles, Dilemmas and Options

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Preface

This book is the product of a lengthy process of co-operation between European academics who study and teach local government. This co-operation started in the late nineties as part of an EU-supported educational project. It was during this project that we developed a 'Joint European Module' (JEM) on local and regional governance. The module has since been used in varying forms in cooperation with approximately ten universities, brought together by Kerstin Kolam of the University of Umea in Sweden.

After the completion of this teaching module, the editors of this book used the JEM-network as the basis for an exploratory study of local democracy, which lead to the publication of "Citizen and City" (Daemen and Schaap 2000). Our former 'JEM-colleagues' were very helpful in this project. On the basis of this positive experience we proposed to continue the former JEM-network and turn it into a research project. Some of the network's members chose to participate in this project while others, who lacked financial resources for research activities, left the group. A number of new colleagues then joined to strengthen the team. Following a number of sessions, the new project was defined as a study of exemplary cases of reform in European local democracies (see chapter 1). This book is the result of that project, involving 13 universities and 22 colleagues contributing to some part. We want to thank all of the participants and those institutions for their willingness to contribute to our work.

It soon became clear that such a project is extremely time-consuming because it demanded the co-operation of fifteen authors, most of whom have substantial teaching tasks and who all work at different universities with different means and opportunities for research. In addition, the work had to be done based on new, fresh, case studies, in accordance with a rather stringent research plan, which contributed to the duration of the project.

So now, some ten years after the first brainstorming sessions, the end result is finally available. We believe that this book will be of use to those who teach local governance or democratic reform in general. We also hope that this book will be a source of inspiration for politicians and public servants. Their task of revitalising local democracy or of devising innovative modes and procedures for citizen participation or the use of new technologies is a heavy one, often with limited success and support. This book can help them to learn from the experiences of colleagues in cities all over Europe and to show them that they are 'not alone' in their struggle with the ambiguities and the realities of democratic local politics.

This publication has been achieved thanks to a grant provided by the Erasmus Trust Fund and a financial contribution from the Department of Public Administration of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. We are also obliged to the editors of this book series, Harald Baldersheim, Peter John, and Hellmut Wollmann, who challenged us with their observations and thus contributed to the academic quality of our work. We also thank Andrea Frankowski and Wiljan Hendrikx, who assisted in finalising the text, and Vivian Carter, who made English of what some of us thought it already was.

Linze Schaap
Harry Daemen

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Chapter one

Puzzles of Local Democracy

Harry Daemen
Linze Schaap

1. Introduction

European local democracies are objects of sharp public criticism. Politicians, commentators and media describe the alienation of citizens, the low voter turnout, the declining interest in politics and public affairs, the weakness of the representative bodies, and the dominance of the executive and/or the bureaucracy. At the same time, however, we observe signs of a growing interest in societal issues and of an increase of political participation outside the area of institutional politics (for example: Tarrow 2000). Also notions of social capital, social cohesion, governance and participatory and direct forms of democracy suggest a growing awareness of this process of change in political styles and orientations. In the daily life of local democracies in many European countries all kinds of expressions of this awareness can be observed. Quite a number of local authorities respond to this changing orientation among citizens by experimenting with new or additional forms of democracy.

What does this mean: is the traditional system of local democracy, mainly based on principles of representation, no longer able to cope with the challenges of the present time? Is it in need of a drastic overhaul, mainly by introducing elements of direct and participatory democracy into the frame of local governance? Or is this so-called crisis in local democracy not very new, but just a somewhat dramatised way of addressing rather common problems? We do not know. This is a subject for an unfinished debate. What we can observe, however, is that many local governments find it necessary to innovate their local democratic practice. These efforts in democratic innovation are the objects of this book. And by analysing these innovations we aim to contribute to the debate on the vitality and viability of (representative) local democracy.

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The book will discuss cases of innovation throughout Western Europe. The rationale behind this is the observation that all European democracies seem to face similar problems. That is not what one would expect. The differences in the conditions and features of local democracy in Europe seem to vary considerably. There are various state traditions and local government systems in Western Europe, each with its own implications for the structures and mechanisms of local government (cf. Hesse and Sharpe 1991; Loughlin and Peters 1997). Differences exist in, for example, the number of tiers of government, the degree of municipal autonomy and discretion, the municipal functions, tasks and competencies, the size of the municipalities, the political and governance set-up at local level, access, and the form of democracy (Page and Goldsmith 1987; Norton 1994; Loughlin and Peters 1997; Kersting and Vetter 2003; Denters and Rose 2005). Where some local systems show voter turnout rates below 25%, some others easily score 70%. Yet, in many cases one can hear comparable complaints about how local democracy fails to attract the citizen. Or, more generally, despite all the variations between the European local democracies, similar complaints about a gap between citizens and their government are formulated as a starting point for processes of democratic reform, which show remarkable similarities with projects in quite different systems.

There are several possible reasons for those unexpected similarities. First of all the systematic differences may not be as huge as presumed. Local democracies in almost all European countries share a theoretical foundation; they are firstly and above all representative democracies. And this representative model has some generally acknowledged weaknesses, which will occur in all representative democracies. Some of these weaknesses are related to theoretical and conceptual problems such as the well-known ‘voting paradox’ (Arrow 1951), the tensions between representative and deliberative conceptions of democracy (Fishkin 1995), and the question of representation as the function of individual representatives or of a ‘responsible party’ (Stokes and Miller 1962). Other weaknesses are more empirical and refer to behavioural weaknesses such as the lack of knowledge and interest of many voters, the weakness of elected officials vis-à-vis the executive and the bureaucracy, or the ‘gap’ between voters and elected politicians. Finally, the representative model is obviously based on territorial divisions, whereas modern citizens tend to live their life across territorial boundaries, which means that the representatives in their home town can only partially represent the interests of the inhabitants. Since these weaknesses are common to all representative systems, similarities in the reform processes

should not surprise us. Reform then, will be aimed at compensating for the weaknesses of the representative model.

Secondly, as far as systematic differences do occur, the gaps between the various local government systems have narrowed in recent decades (Goldsmith and Page 2010: 245 ff.), partly because of some general developments which have affected all the countries and therefore the municipalities (John 2001; Vetter and Kersting 2003: 333; Denters and Rose 2005: 2ff). Some of these developments have been prompted by new policy challenges related to, amongst others, the environment, ageing populations, the economy, migration and integration. The threat of political apathy is another universal phenomenon, as is the increasing involvement of the private sector, including the local business community and groups of ordinary citizens. There are some striking similarities in the way municipalities in Western Europe deal with these questions. Terms like 'governance', 'new public management', 'contracting out', 'privatisation', 'public private partnership', 'community partnerships', and 'multi-level and multi-actor governance' are "but a few of the neologisms that pervade current publications on local politics and government" (Denters and Rose 2005: 1). Such similarities should not, of course, obscure what are still distinct differences between municipalities and between countries, but they do improve the prospects for comparative analysis. Thinking in terms of governance in particular is a very important development in international public administration (cf. John 2001: 17; Denters and Rose 2005: 1; Goldsmith 2005: 243). Cynical observers might say that fashionable concepts quickly acquire a remarkable adherence.

2. Background of the study

Whatever the explanations of the remarkable isomorphism in democratic reform at the local level, the empirical knowledge is still rather limited. Back in 2000 the editors of this volume conducted a country-by-country exploration of local democratic reforms (Daemen and Schaap (eds.) 2000). The book reported on fifteen case studies and covered fifteen cities and their democratic reforms in eight countries (Finland, Sweden, Ireland, England, Germany, Belgium, France, and Spain). We concluded that a number of issues might be addressed in further studies. Among those were the following:

- Participatory strategies. What kinds of techniques are used; how do these techniques relate to the traditional system of representative governance; what role models are being developed for the behaviour of politicians and civil servants? And, what are the consequences of these developments for the relationship between citizens and their municipalities?
- The quality of civil society in modern European cities. Modern life in big cities, with the associated problems of individualisation, alienation, lack of social control and loneliness, seems to conflict with the communitarian idea of citizens who are well integrated into social and political networks. What then is the relevance of communitarian thought: is the neighbourhood approach a practical option of rebuilding communities? Or are the communitarian ideas mainly slogans and a 'cover-up' for the introduction of group democracy, in situations where individual citizens are difficult to reach and involve?

In order to estimate the relevance of these themes we conducted a quick scan amongst colleagues in almost all present and future EU member states.[1] The scan suggested that these issues can still be seen as relevant topics for studies of local democracy. Since then, several authors have published relevant studies. Those studies significantly enlarged the body of knowledge on local democracy. However, there are still some gaps which remain. Some of the studies are based on a country-by-country comparison (Loughlin (ed.) 1999; Caulfield and Larsen (eds.) 2002; Denters and Rose (eds.) 2005). Other authors studied a specific aspect of local government, such as mayors (Bäck, Heinelt and Magnier (eds.) 2006; Berg and Rao (eds.) 2005; Reynaert, Steyvers, Delwit and Pilet (eds) 2009) or area committees (Bäck, Gjelstrup, Helgesen, Johansson and Klausen, (eds.) 2005). The effects of specific reforms of local democracy, however, remain largely unknown. This volume aims at significantly filling that knowledge gap.

We can readily conclude, thanks to this growth of the body of knowledge, that because of the way local democracy functions it is one of the problems which all local governments in Western Europe are faced with. The public is realigning itself. People are bonding less with their local community and becoming more individualistic. They are demanding more and better services from government. At the same time, they are more willing to participate, debate and act. The importance of traditional representative democracy is declining. These trends are creating a tension

1 The results have not been published but are available for inspection.

between representative democracy and trust in an elected body on the one hand, and public input and participation on the other. All of this is taking place against a background of increasing social fragmentation.

Not only are the democratic problems that local governments face quite similar, but also the ways in which they address these problems. Four strategies – some more interventionist than others – are being deployed (Daemen and Schaap 2000; Caulfield and Larsen 2002; Kersting and Vetter 2003; Denters and Rose 2005).

The first aims to strengthen the existing model of representation by, for example, reforming the electoral system, simplifying the voting procedures or improving the performance of the municipal councils. The second attempts to broaden the concept of representation by inviting people to participate in dialog but still maintaining representation as the only source of legitimate authority. Many countries have thus created nonbinding mechanisms of citizen consultation such as opinion polls, panel discussions, and advisory boards. The third strategy sees the citizen as a customer. In this vision the core concept is 'customer democracy', which is sometimes put into practice by defining the quality of services that citizens are entitled to expect, and sometimes by allowing citizens a say in the decisions on services. Likewise, the fourth strategy adds another form of democracy to electoral representation: direct and participative democracy, which embraces referenda, elected mayors, co-produced policy, and self-governance by citizens. In this strategy, the power to make binding decisions moves in part from the representative council to civil society or even to individuals or groups of ordinary citizens.

3. Problems of representative democracy

Given this background, the common theoretical focus of this book is to be found in theories of democracy – more specific in theories about the representative system and its alternatives.

Theorists of democracy are a strange kind of people: in general they are convinced supporters of the representative democratic system, prone to concur with Winston Churchill's observation that it is "the best possible way to govern". Yet, in their professional practice they excel in demonstrating the weaknesses of the (representative) democratic model. This criticism of democracy has a long tradition in the social sciences. We mention just a few highlights.

3.1 Democracy discussed

A. Public choice

One of the main topics of criticism of democracy focuses on voting as a method to transfer individual preferences into a collective preference. Arrow (1951) expresses his doubts about this in his so-called impossibility theorem. His analysis has triggered a stream of publications trying to solve this theorem or to define acceptable ways to overcome the implicated problems (for an overview: Campbell and Kelly 2002). Other theorists use the logic of Public Choice to argue that the power of bureaucrats can take forms that are not compatible with the classical vision of the loyal civil servant (Tullock 1965; Downs 1967; Niskanen 1971) Anthony Downs (1957) stresses the tendency of political parties, especially parties in a two-party system, to position themselves in the centre of the political spectrum. And Robert Dahl, usually not seen as a public choice theorist, uses in his Preface to Democratic Theory (1956) formal logical argumentation to illustrate that the pure forms of democracy cannot exist, concluding that democracy can only exist in the real world in the form of a hybrid system. These classical works triggered a massive stream of publications and discussions on the nature of democracy (for an overview Mueller 2003). The relevance of these discussions is the conclusion that democracy is a complex system trying to combine a stressful set of values, which, applied in the real world, will always be a compromise or, as Dahl puts it, a hybrid system. A system, which cannot be seen as sacrosanct and is open to experiment and change.

B. Behavioural criticism

Empirical political scientists have been active since the introduction of the survey technique to investigate the behaviour of citizens and elected officials. It started with the early election studies, like The American Voter (Campbell et al. 1960), which showed that the electorate does not vote on the basis of a clear view of the political alternatives and, more generally, seems to miss the most basic knowledge on politics and the political system. In later research more detail was given to this view by linking it to social class and by using the concept of ideology (Devine 1970) leading to a more varied view on the electorate, as comprising parts that can be called alienated or disinterested, but also parts that we defined as attentive. Research into the

political views of elected politicians showed a remarkable gap between the policy preferences of the voters and the elected representatives (May 1973).

The image arises of a closed “political class”, which is only accessible to those who speak the language of traditional politics, who share their ideological style of discourse, and who are skilled in the use of the mechanisms of party politics. More recently the topic of (declining) trust has drawn much attention. This line of arguments suggests important variables like trust, political interest, citizenship, (selective) participation, responsiveness, and variables elaborating the role of political parties. In addition, this line of arguments again demonstrates that democracy, this time in its empirical model, shows weaknesses, which justify a constant search for improvement.

C. Politics and administration

A special subset of the behavioural studies that have been carried out is formed by the work of researchers and theorists who stress the complicated relationship between elected politicians and the civil service (the bureaucracy). Part of this work has already been mentioned when we spoke about Public Choice. But in addition to this, it is also relevant to point to the stream of empirical studies of decision making or policy making which almost generally lead to observations about the very strong position of civil servants and the civil service and their tendency to dominate decision making to such a degree that it makes it hard to combine with straightforward views about the leadership of the elected politicians (Peters 1995). This has triggered debates about the proper role of civil servants in a modern real-life democracy: concepts like political entrepreneurialism, public leadership, street-level bureaucracy emerged (Lipsky 1980; Osborne and Gaebler 1992). In several of the following chapters we will analyse aspects of the role of the civil service.

D. Communitarianism

Some theorists address the issue of growing individualisation as a risk for the democratic process and stress the relevance of a vital civil society as a condition of democracy (for example Putnam’s Bowling Alone 2000). Based on the work of philosophers like Sandel (1982) and Waltzer (1983), public administration theorists like Etzioni (1993) started a “communitarian network”, dedicated to the promotion of administrative practices, which try to cope with the issue of individualisation and fragmentation of public life. They stress the need to involve civil society into the

policy making process. Putnam, in a book with the challenging title "Making Democracy Work", claims that the history of Italian Public Administration shows that a vital civil society is conducive to public welfare (Putnam et al. 1993). These ideas, which attracted quite a lot of attention from politicians and administrators, contributed to processes of decentralisation, empowerment of neighbourhoods and participatory forms of democracy at the local level.

E. Alternative models of democracy

Taking into account the perceived weaknesses of the representative system, some theorists and practitioners suggest that other traditions in democratic thinking are gaining relevance; partly because these alternative democratic models may help to mitigate some of the weaknesses of the existing representative system and, partly because the analysis of complexity of modern governance and the associated argument in favour of network or participatory governance seems plausible enough to put it to a test. When looking at local government in Europe (cf. Schaap et al. 2010), we conclude that most of the experiments with new forms and instruments of democracy refer to concepts of democracy like direct democracy (referendums, citizens' initiatives, mayoral elections (bearing elements of representative democracy too) pluralist or group democracy (network governance), democracy as government by discussion (e-democracy, participatory democracy). The hopes and dreams about what can be realised are manifold. Direct democracy appears to be an attractive solution to the perceived distance between citizens and politics and offers opportunities for a clear political choice, rather than a choice of a package of preferences (party programme). Direct elections of the mayor opens the way for the selection of a local political leader by the people, rather than by secret negotiations between elected politicians behind closed doors in smoky backrooms. Pluralist democracy gives people hope for the involvement of organised interest, of "civil society" in the political process, thus opening routes for the expression of the interests of intense minorities. And discussion-based models of democracy (e-democracy; participatory democracy) could open new opportunities to introduce more people to political discussions and perhaps, maybe even, in the process of policy formation. Democratic reforms along these lines might produce answers to citizen alienation, why minority interests have been neglected, what has caused decreasing legitimacy, and what has allowed "old school" politics by a "self-selecting political class" to be perpetuated.

Attractive as this may seem, combining representative democracy with other more direct or participatory forms of governance is not without problems. Klijn and Skelcher (2007) sketch four possible views on the relationship between representative and participative models. These four are: incompatible, complementary, transitional, and instrumental. Two of these views (incompatible and transitional) stress the impossibility to combine representative democracy and participatory democracy (network governance). The 'complementary' view seems to be the most popular, but even this view stresses weaknesses of the representative system and suggests how new forms of governance could fill (part of) the gap. Furthermore, we suggest that the *local* nature of the democracies under investigation should receive special attention.

We dare attempt to suggest, but can provide no solutions, that it would be valuable to investigate whether the organisational basis of national politics (representation) is also the optimal model for *local* politics. If local governance finds part of its origins in the "Tocquevillean hope" for government close to the citizen, the alternative models of democracy suggest the implementation of political instruments beyond voting, like participatory democracy at neighbourhood level, e-democracy using local media and so on. If dreams are at least partly true. But lacking firm knowledge about the dynamics of democratic reform, dreams and hopes are important signposts for local politicians and administrators.

F. Scale of governance

Finally, we may observe that local representative democracy is leaking away as a result of what we might call "problems of scale". As we stated earlier, the representative model is based on territorial divisions, whereas modern citizens tend to live their life across territorial boundaries. Furthermore, every policy problem has its own scale (Dahl and Tufte 1973). As a result, it seems impossible to find an optimal scale for multi-purpose government bodies such as municipalities. For some issues municipalities will be too large, for others too small. For this reason quite a number of municipalities enter into regional co-operations with other municipalities and/or organise area councils or the like. From a democratic point of view, there are serious doubts about the effectiveness of these organisations, especially when inter-municipal co-operation concerns joint strategic policies (cf. ROB 2000), or when area councils are not directly elected. In both cases, municipal councils are no longer able to act as the expression of local democracy. In safeguarding the democratic quality of inter-municipal policies, they require adequate involvement. Especially in

the practice of inter-municipal co-operation, however, local councils face serious problems in accessing the necessary information and in significantly influencing decision-making. This is, of course, not a unique issue. It resembles the contested position of representative bodies in the governance era (cf. Franzke et al. 2007; cf. Bekkers et al. 2007; Sørensen & Torfing 2007a).

3.2 Some puzzles

This brief overview of theoretical notions relevant to our research leaves us with a set of questions, and puzzles to be solved. The first set concerns the relationship between classical representative democracy and its alternatives. The core of the second set of questions is whether these alternative forms of democracy do actually work and contribute to the revitalisation of local democracy. And finally, in the third set, questions will be answered referring to the way local democracy can adapt itself to new developments in local governance, like (a) the emergence of entrepreneurial civil servants, challenging the traditional division of labour between civil servants and politicians, and (b) the growing regional interdependence in which local governments are caught.

3.2.1 Puzzles related to representation and its alternatives

A. Revitalisation of representative democracy

Can the traditional model of representation be adapted to meet the present societal demands by improving representative practices? Can a more perfect system of representation contribute to bridging the gap between citizens and politics? Can representative democracy be revitalised in such a way that it is able to address the challenges of traditional democracy as discussed in Section 1? Can it bring an end to the decrease in voting turnout, in the unattractiveness of political parties, in the decline of trust in elected politicians and democratic politics in general? Some efforts to reform local democracy seem to follow this strategy of ‘perfecting representative practice’ by making elected politicians more visible, accessible and responsive, or by improving aspects of the representative process, like the voting system, or the system of council meetings. Is this reaction strong enough to counter the problems of local democratic vitality?

B. Tensions between representative and participatory democracy?

Both models of democracy have different starting points. Can they be combined? What roles should local representatives play when participatory elements and practices are added to representative local democracy? At this moment, local democracy is indirect democracy (Switzerland being the exception to this rule), while a substantial part of reform projects are inspired by values and practices derived from the concept of participatory democracy. Many words underline the latest attention to new forms of democracy: participatory democracy, interactive governance, governance and so on (Barnes 1999; Bobbio 1984; Budge 1993; Held 1993). However, it seems to be accepted that the basic system will remain to be of a representative nature, enriched with new techniques and values. One of the most challenging tasks seems to be to find a new balance between these two very different ideals and forms of democracy, and to redefine elected representatives' roles in that balance. The participatory models stress the need of societal participation in public decision-making and insist on a more modest and different role of elected politicians. In theory, as Klijn and Skelcher (2007) state there are three relevant views on this tension. The first view stresses the conflict between both models, thus indicating that participatory practices will always be strange, stressful, elements within a predominantly representative democratic practice. The second view suggests that the future lies in new, participatory forms of democracy. They give the relevant answers to the complexities of modern day decision-making. This implies the need for a fundamental redesign of democratic practice. The third view states that both models of democracy can be seen as complementary. In practice this means that the existing representative practice will remain the backbone of democratic practice, but, at the same time, it is in need of a thorough innovation and enrichment through the introduction of participatory techniques. The question, then, is not only how to organise effective participatory processes, but also how to redefine the role of elected politicians, especially when dealing with the results of participatory projects. This will perhaps not only require a new vision of the role of the elected politician, but also require even more attention because some of the cases in our exploratory research illustrate that also changes in the position of appointed officials, especially local civil servants, could occur.

3.2.2 Puzzles related to alternative models in practice

C. Is e-democracy a useful instrument for the reinforcement of local democracy?
Do ICTs only serve as an administrative tool for efficient service delivery by strengthening the information about the city and its inhabitants? Or can ICTs be used to expand democracy to e-democracy? If so, how will e-democracy affect local representative democracy? Can ICTs help to support citizens' participation in the formulation of local policies? Can they serve as a democratic tool and as a means to improved participation? And can they help to create opportunities to participate in decision-making processes at an earlier stage than usual? In answering this question it has to be clear that e-democracy is a potential solution amidst others. Furthermore, it is an instrument that can be applied in different ways. In some cases it is used for voting by Internet. Then it is used for the reinforcement of the legitimacy of the representative system by enlarging the number of votes cast. In other cases it serves as an electronic device for political decision-making in specific situations. Under these circumstances it can be used as a referendum for the inhabitants of a local community. In still other cases e-democracy can be used to stimulate the political discussion through discussion forums, platforms, chat-sites and e-panels.

D. Civil society's role in the enhancement of local democracy
Besides those tensions between representative and participative democracy models, there is another tension which can be observed. Civil society increasingly plays a role, or demands to do so. Associative democracy is yet another addition to the present democratic practice. Associative democracy is based (Held 1993) on the idea that citizens organise themselves and strive for a certain amount of self-organisation and self-government: community as the focal point instead of the entire society. Civil society organisations can be very strong, and may be very well-supported by the citizenry. In some cases they will be competitors to official political institutions. On the other hand, if political institutions gain the support of civil society, their involvement in policy-making processes may strengthen the legitimacy of local government. To what degree is civil society self-organisation a viable solution for public governance issues? Can institutionalised politics cope with this idea of self-organisation? Who 'organises' self-organisation?

3.2.3 Puzzles related to the changing context of local democracy

After considering the above puzzles on democratic renewal, we will now turn to three developments that affect local democracy: changes in leadership, scale reduction or urban decentralisation, and scale enlargement or regionalisation.

E. Can political leadership compensate for the loss of politicians' power over the bureaucracy?

In plural societies representative democracy results in plural political leadership. Even in majority systems, a number of political parties exist, and within those parties several opinions may come to the fore. Thus leadership is divided over several offices and politicians. In Nordic and Germanic local democracies this can be observed most clearly; collegial bodies govern. In traditional committee systems in Anglo-Saxon countries the council leader and the committee leaders share the power. In all countries, however, politicians seem to have lost power to professionals and local bureaucrats. Individual leadership may address that loss of power. It starts, however, from a different angle than representation. Representation heavily draws on the variation of opinions in modern society and leads to the formation of various political parties and in many countries to government by coalitions. Individual leadership, however, seems to promote government by a single hand, at the local level often by (non-) elected mayors. What experiences do we have, does individual leadership significantly change the face of local democracy. Or can representation and leadership co-exist?

F. Urban decentralisation and the gap between citizens and local government

In quite a number of cities, decentralisation to neighbourhood level takes place in order to strengthen participation on a smaller scale rather than at city level. This decentralisation sometimes concerns service delivery, sometimes political decision-making. Some local governments create area committees or even directly elected sub-municipalities. Strengthening the link between citizens and government is, occasionally, the main goal. By reducing the scale of local government, citizens and their representatives may get to know each other again. There are, however, also other reasons to institutionalise these organs. They are also used for the solution of management problems within city government. When the way the local organisation works is considered as relatively inefficient, the same tool is applied. The intention

can also be to lessen the burden of the central municipal organisation. City hall has to be relieved of detailed decision-making. Even then, urban decentralisation may very well have an effect on the gap between citizens and government. What are the results for local democracy? Does the reduction of scale of local government lead to stronger local democracy, to bridging the gap between citizens and local government?

G. Regionalisation and democratic legitimacy of local government

Finally, due to all kinds of developments worldwide, many local issues demand answers at the regional level. Therefore, policy making is in many cases not the exclusive responsibility of single local governments. Decisions have to be made by either regional authorities or in intergovernmental networks. Especially in the latter case, councils are still the final decision-makers. In safeguarding the democratic quality of inter-municipal policies, they require adequate involvement. In practice, however, local councils face serious problems in accessing the necessary information and in significantly influencing decision-making at the inter-municipal level. The creation of an inter-municipal representative body might compensate for this. However, these bodies rarely exist. Democratic legitimacy of inter-municipal policies can therefore be no better than 'borrowed' and imperfect legitimacy through indirect representation by local councils. Again, the question is, what does this mean for local democracy? Do local authorities loose legitimacy, or, quite paradoxically, win in this respect?

3.3 Assessing the results of democratic renewal

In order to find the effects of the processes of democratic reform, it will be necessary to distinguish between two sets of results. The first refers to the concrete results of democratic reform, seen against the background of the problems to which reform was supposed to be the answer. Or to phrase it in more simple terms: did it work? The second set of results, or rather effects, focuses on the puzzles we formulated into questions in this book: did local democracies succeed in solving these puzzles? Finally, we will look for explanations in every chapter. How can we explain what we found? When analysing whether "reform did work", we used criteria derived from the expectations of the local actors involved: what did the actors themselves

expect from reform? Other studies of reform suggest that it is necessary to not only look at the direct effects of reform. The durability of the effects is just as important. Some research shows examples of experiments with democratic reform, which greatly satisfied the participants, but seemed to have no lasting effects. It worked as long as the project continued but little enduring effects on social and political reintegration and participation emanated from it (Edelenbos and Monnikhof 2001). The criteria local actors use are related to theoretical notions like effectiveness, legitimacy, accountability and fairness in the local system of governance (Pateman 1970; Sartori 1987). Not only are the effects on values like these interesting but also new forms of democracy can be expected to have an impact on the decision making structure as a whole. What are the emerging new roles of citizens, politicians and civil servants? What are the effects of these experiments on the relative position of these actors?

The second set of results concerns the puzzles that are central in the respective chapters. How did actors at the local level cope with the puzzles, did they recognise them as such? Did they solve the puzzles? How did they solve them, to what extent, in what way and with what results? Did these reforms conflict with the existing democracy and how was this conflict solved?

Finally, if we are correct in assuming that these puzzles are real or at least justifiable and if the puzzles have been solved in practice, how did this happen? What solutions did local democracies find? Are institutional and structural dimensions important, especially the position of local government vis à vis the central or federal government, the size of municipalities, the nature of local autonomy, and characteristics of the local system like size, staff and budget (Dahl and Tufte 1973; Katz 2000; Putnam et al. 1993)? Can, for instance, extremely limited policy discretion prevent local democratic reforms from succeeding? Or can the style of local governing serve as another source of explanation?

4. Research design

The theoretical considerations and puzzles, described above, form the basis for the central *research question*, guiding the case studies presented in this book:

> *How do European municipalities address the contested character of local democracy? What kind of reforms do they introduce and what are the results?*

Since each chapter will elaborate on a specific aspect of democratic reform, it is unnecessary to specify this question in more detail. Each chapter will provide its own set of derived research questions.

Basis of comparison

Given the widely divergent national backgrounds, the reforms in European local democracies are remarkable for their similarities (see Section 1, above). This makes it legitimate for researchers to go beyond country-by-country comparisons. The present study's character therefore differs from the ones mentioned above. It does not concentrate on one specific reform as its focal point or, nor make comparisons between countries. Instead, this book is structured around a number of themes, 'puzzles', deduced from theoretical as well as empirical studies (see above). We studied these puzzles from a national and local context in order to find out what results they delivered. Our aim was not to present reforms as such or give all-encompassing overviews (Loughlin, Hendriks & Lidström 2010). Neither did it seem relevant to present the most recent developments in the reforms, or recently formulated Government proposals. Instead, this book presents empirical insights in into how, and why, specific reforms lead to the results found by the authors.

This study presents a substantial number of cases of local democratic reform and compares these reform projects as efforts to provide answers to the previously mentioned puzzles. Thus, it provides comparative knowledge that goes beyond observing and classifying differences between countries. Of course, nationality and national history or government tradition could be an important explanatory variable. Central and Eastern European countries are examples of these variables. Due to their specific history, it would be complicated to understand developments in these countries, without taking into account their recent experiences with Communist regimes and their political turn-over. This is why we have not included the Central European local democracies in this study; they deserve to be dealt with separately.

Case selection

In practical terms this book consists of chapters organised around a concrete puzzle. Each chapter analyses at least three cases from different countries with different state traditions. The cases are selected as examples of the way local authorities ad-

dress the puzzle. The cases presented in this study illustrate the puzzles as well as the attempts to solve them. Essentially, the case selection was left to the discretion of the authors. In doing so they used their own expertise, as well as suggestions from colleagues and practitioners. This procedure unavoidably leads to a somewhat subjective selection. But, to be sure, the authors *do not claim that the cases are representative for all countries or projects of renewal.* Cases are selected because they can tell us something about a certain category of renewal and its results. The authors were responsible for organising the research and selecting their respondents themselves.

Qualitative research

The central research goal underlines that we will not be satisfied with simply categorising processes of reform. Indeed: if this were our purpose a representative, quantitative approach might be the proper research strategy. Apart from the fact that we have serious doubts about the possibility to present such a complete and representative picture of developments in the democratic character of local government, our interest is different. It lies with the fundamentals of democratic reform; we want to investigate reforms that touch upon the basics of local democracy. The focus in this study is on reforms that either challenge the existing forms of local democracy, or can be considered as well-designed, innovative efforts to revitalise local democracy by exploiting the values and instruments of the existing form of democracy to the full. In doing so we will try to take into account the effects of general tendencies in public administration, such as co-operation between local government, civil society and public governance. These research interests explain the choice of research strategy: we opted for in-depth, qualitative analyses of a selected set of reforms, rather than a quantitative exploration of a wide set of characteristics of local democratic reform in general. This kind of qualitative research is best fit to uncover the basics of what is going on. The choice of data collection methods was left to the chapter authors.

Each chapter is based on original research, though the authors, of course, referred to existing empirical studies. The questions to be answered in the case-studies were the following. Firstly, what do the specific projects look like, in terms of problems that are addressed, roles of the citizens that are targeted, roles, functions and institutions of local governance that are involved. Secondly, what happened when the projects started? Finally, to what extent do the projects solve the problems addressed and which other consequences can be observed?

5. Structure of the book

The introductory chapter describes the research questions, main theories and methodology of this book and is followed by the empirical chapters. Chapters 2 to 8 discuss the above formulated puzzles and the chapter authors present and analyse their case studies and draw conclusions. The final chapter presents the general conclusions. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the puzzles related to representation and its alternatives. Chapter 2 focuses on efforts of renewal which try to stay within the boundaries of the representative model. Chapter 3 discusses what happens when new models are combined with existing modes of representation.

Chapters 4 and 5 illustrate how local governments make use of various reform strategies which can be derived from alternative models of democracy. In Chapter 4, the use of ICT in revitalising local democracy is illustrated and discussed. Chapter 5 is about the way civil society organisations are involved in the formation and implementation of local policy.

The third set of chapters pays attention to three changes in the context of local democracy: the emergence of the so-called entrepreneurial civil servant and political leadership (Chapter 6), the consequences of intra-municipal decentralisation (Chapter 7), and the effects of regionalisation of local governance (Chapter 8).

In Chapter 9, the editors of this book reflect on the empirical evidence presented and formulate the conclusions of this book.

Chapter two

Revitalising Representative Democracy

Harry Daemen[2]

1. Introduction

In all countries represented in this book, local democracy is shaped in accordance with the model of *representative democracy* (John 2001; Batley and Stoker 1991). Yet, most examples of reform in local democracies do not focus on reforming the existing representative democratic system itself. Rather, they seem to aim at enriching democratic practice with the introduction of new techniques and approaches inspired by other concepts like direct, discursive or participatory democracy[3], following the movement from "local government" to "local governance" observable throughout Europe (John 2001). Of course one should not overstate this point. Some cities do experiment with strategies that can directly be linked to representative democracy[4]. Yet, the most mentioned examples of local democratic reform do not focus on the representative system. It looks as if the main source of inspiration for democratic reform is nowadays found outside the classical model of representation. In this chapter we deal with the question whether the model of representative democracy can still inspire democratic practice.

The classical model of representative democracy (Pitkin 1969) can be depicted as a system based on a division of labour between citizens and elected representa-

2 The author wants to thank Hans de Bekker, Sander Figee, Rania Haverkotte, Dennis in 't Hof, Patricia Hol, Nande Kootker, E.F. Kraan, Carlo Magnoesing, B. Mo Ajok, Lenny Roseleur, Marlies Strieder and Floris van Zonneveld, students of the Post-experience Masters Programme in Public Administration of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Their fieldwork on the three cases was of indispensable value for the completion of this chapter. Of course, the author bears the full responsibility for this text.

3 See chapter 1.

4 For example Genk, Grenoble and Stockholm (as observed in 2000), in: Daemen and Schaap, 2000, pp. 111-128, pp. 129-144 and 37-56.

L. Schaap, H. Daemen (Eds.), *Renewal in European Local Democracies,*
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tives. These elected officials, acting on behalf of the citizens and organised in a representative body (the council), are the highest decision makers in the system (the legislative power) and supervise the performance of the executive body (the government).

The interpretation of the concept of representation may vary (Converse and Pierce 1986: 490-530). To some representation means “to make the citizen present” in the formal decision making arena (representation of the electorate), where others mainly refer to the political programmes on which the representative is elected (representation of political views). Whatever position one chooses: the role of the citizen is that of a voter, who transfers his ‘sovereignty’, to an elected body, acting on his behalf as the highest decision-maker. In order to make this system function, some conditions have to be fulfilled (this is not meant as an exhaustive list): (1) the voter has to decide which person or persons can best represent him or her; (2) the representative has to represent his/her voters and (3) the representative needs to have real decision-making power.

There is a large amount of academic literature that illustrates why these conditions will never be fulfilled in a perfect way. Chapter 1 has covered this and we will not rehash this here. In addition to this academic work, modern democratic practice also contributes to the criticism of representative democracy. Politicians, journalists and other opinion leaders complain about the decreasing electoral turn out, decreasing party membership and loss of respect for, or trust in the elected bodies. These developments, common to almost all existing representative systems, suggest that the electoral process and the political party are loosing legitimacy, credibility and relevance.

So, this is our puzzle: While our systems of democracy are constructed around the idea of representation and our constitutions and institutions are developed on that basis, most reform projects seem inspired by alternative approaches to democracy, like discursive and participatory democracy, or even direct democracy.[5] Even more: many of these reform projects are actually motivated with references to the weaknesses of the representative system! This leaves us with the puzzle about the relevance of the idea of representation. In order to further explore this, we will present in this chapter some examples of efforts to innovate the representative democracy at local level.

5 In chapter 3, Edwards will analyse the tension between these new forms of democracy and the classical representative model.

2. Research question

In our analysis of the examples of reform in this chapter we will try to find answers to our questions about the relevance of classical representative democracy. In doing so, our central question is:

"To what degree is reform of the representative democracy a meaningful strategy for solving problems in local democracies?"

Following the general format of the research questions formulated in chapter 1, we will first investigate the problem to which the chosen form of democratic renewal is supposed to be an answer. On what analysis of the traditional democratic process is the reform based? What assumptions underlie the proposals for renewal? The second research question deals with what happened during the reform. Did it cause conflict and controversies? What were facilitating factors? Lastly, we will try to investigate what the results of the renewal were. Did they bring what was expected? Together, the answers to these three questions will enable us to answer the central question of this chapter.

3. Case selection

In section 1 we distinguished three crucial dimensions of the representative process: voting (the voter has to decide which person can best represent him or her), representing (the representative has to represent his/her voters[6]), and governing (the representative needs to have real decision-making power).

In order to cover the concept of representation in a broad manner, the case selection has to be organised around these three dimensions[7]. We selected one case for each of the three dimensions. The 'universum' from which these cases were selected consisted of cases of reform, suggested by colleagues, of found in literature and internet.

6 For linguistic ease we will treat the words 'voter' and 'representative' as a male word in the rest of this text.

7 This procedure resembles the so-called 'diverse case method' of case selection, as described by Seawright and Gerring (2008).

A. Voting

Not many cases of reform of the voting technique were found. The most prominent of those were the ongoing reforms of voting in Germany, where starting in Bavaria a new voting technique is being introduced, most recently in Hess, where we selected the capital, Wiesbaden, as our first case.

Wiesbaden: A more exact way to express political preferences?

One of the criticised aspects of voting is the fact that the vote cast is a vote for the whole party platform. Many voters, however, do not completely agree with all the priorities and choices of the party they voted for. They might, for example want to vote conservative on socio-economic issues, but progressive on cultural or educational issues. This is impossible in the present voting systems. Additionally, the voters have little or no influence on the composition of the list, which limits their influence on who actually will represent them.

An interesting effort to facilitate the voter to translate his political preferences in a vote can be found in Germany, where in many of the *Länder* the electoral system is changed in such a way that the voter can cast as many votes as there are seats in the local council. This means that the voter is not limited to selecting just one party as his representative. The citizen can divide his votes over more parties. This gives the citizens the possibility to vote in a more nuanced way. He does not have to support one party for the full 100 percent, but can also show his sympathy for other parties. He can also decide to vote predominantly for party A, but at the same time give some support to a candidate from another party for whom he feels sympathy.

B. Representing

The working procedures of the local councils appear to be quite incomprehensible for ordinary citizens and seem to give them little chance to express their views. They don't have the feeling that they are represented in this somewhat abstract, sometimes bureaucratic process of legislative decision making. The most common reform of the working procedures of the councils is the process of strengthening the division between legislative and executive powers. Examples of this are the process of 'dualisation' in the Netherlands and the introduction of a new Local Government Act 2000 in the United Kingdom (Gains, John and Stoker 2005). But these kinds of reforms are quite wide, covering many aspects of public governance. An interesting case, which follows up on these reforms, was found in the city of Almere (the Netherlands), where in conjunction to the process of 'dualisation' the working proce-

dures were changed to stimulate public interest and participation in the work of the local council (see also chapter 3).

Almere: A local council close to the citizens?
Most councils in the Netherlands have a committee structure. This implies that council decision-making is prepared in one or more of these committees. Thus, the formal council meeting can quickly decide on complicated matters, which were discussed and agreed upon in committee meetings. This leaves the citizen, visiting the meeting of the council, with the frustrating impression of a council, which decides on quite crucial issues in the wink of an eye, without much debate. Other citizens, better informed, may visit committee meetings and, sometimes, even enjoy the right to speak and be heard. For them it is just the other way around: they may be surprised or even irritated by the debates in the formal council, where the whole committee debate is duplicated, or where the tone of the debate and its outcome sometimes seem to be in contradiction to what happened in the committee. More general: the councils operating procedures are often unclear to citizens and the proceedings quite boring, technical or abstract, far away from the daily lives of citizens, thus contributing to the growing alienation between politicians and citizens.

The city of Almere started an experiment some years ago in which the traditional council meeting was exchanged for a “Political Market”. The committee structure was abolished and replaced by weekly meetings of councillors and interested citizens in workshops, followed by a meeting of the council.

C. Governing
One of the above-mentioned problems in modern representative democracy is the weakness of the position of members of the local council (see chapter 1). Their formal position is officially quite strong. They are members of the council: the highest public authority and the exclusive legislative institution of the local community, supposed to govern. In practice, however, we hear complaints about the executive body and/or the chief executive (the mayor) taking over the actual legislative function (with the council ‘rubberstamping’ the decisions). Or about the dominance of the local civil service, based on their superior knowledge and experience. And about citizens who fear that council members are losing contact with society.

Looking for a case where a concentrated effort was made to strengthen the position of the local councillors, our attention was drawn by Newham, a borough within the Greater London area. What made Newham especially interesting was the

fact that the efforts to reform the position of the councillors were made in conjunction with the ongoing process of disentangling the legislative and the executive function, and with the switch to the direct election of the mayor (Copus 2006).

Newham: A new and stronger position for the members of the local council?
In Newham the mayor has made it his task to change this. He developed the concept of the "influential councillor" and tries to work toward a stronger position of the councillors in the process of policy making and in their local community, by stressing their representative function and by looking for ways to improve the support given by the public service to the councillors in their actual work. More visible to their constituencies, active in policy formation and adequately supported by the local bureaucracy, they are supposed to become strong representatives again.

4. Methodology

In order to gather the required information on the three cases we used a strategy including the analysis of available documents (written or digital), complemented with a series of 'on the spot' qualitative interviews. The documents vary from the official documents in which the reform activity is described, academic literature (where available), to other more informal sources like the Internet or the media. We explicitly looked for documents of proponents and critics of the reform. In practice it turned out to be difficult to find critical written documents in all cases. Thus, most of the critical comments were provided in the interviews.

The respondents of the interviews were selected in a 'snow ball' manner[8]: we first approached officials, responsible for the decision on or the implementation of the specific case of reform. Successively we invited the interviewees to name possible respondents. We explicitly asked also for persons critical of the reform. We continued this technique till all relevant categories of respondents were covered: political and administrative; councillors and administrators. In the Wiesbaden case we focused on administrators and politicians involved in the reform process. The impact of this reform on the voters, the citizens, was covered by survey date gathered by the Hessisches Statistisches Landesambt (the statistical office of Hess). In

8 Snowball sampling, or respondent driven sampling (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004) is especially useful in exploratory and descriptive research, when the population of respondents is unknown.

Almere, the nature of the case suggested that involved politicians and administrators were to be interviewed, as well as citizens who made use of the new participatory possibilities. Additional data on the citizens were derived from evaluation research done by the local government. The Newham respondents were the mayor, who initiated the reform and members of his public service, and of course the local councillors, on whom the reform effort was focused. Not only the vast majority of councillors who favoured the reform, but also those who were critical of it. In appendix 1 the list of respondents is presented. In selecting these respondents we were greatly helped by several officials, who suggested names of people involved and, just as easy, of people critical of the project.

The interviews were semi-structured and qualitative, conducted by graduate students in public administration, on the basis of instructions provided by the author of this chapter.

4. Three cases of reform

4.1. Wiesbaden: Changing the expression of the individual's political preference.

When voting for the local council, a citizen usually has the opportunity to express his support for just one individual candidate (or list). With this vote the voter supports the complete package of preferences of the candidate or list. No exemptions can be made.

In Wiesbaden, as in many other German cities, the electoral system has recently been changed to accommodate for this problem. The new voting technique is called "Kumulieren und Panachieren" (Prahl 2009). This name expresses two important elements of this system. The citizen is given as many votes as there are seats in the council. When voting, the citizen can give more than one vote to a specific candidate (in the Wiesbaden case the maximum is three) thus cumulating his votes on candidates preferred most (kumulieren). Also the voter is not limited to supporting just one party (or list), but he can express a mixed set of preferences and distribute his votes over candidates from various lists (panachieren, mixing).

So, the voter has three ways to express his political preferences:

a. The voter can give all his votes to the party of his choice: the so-called 'Listenkreuz', more or less the traditional vote for one party.

b. The voter can distribute all his votes (81 in Wiesbaden) among the various candidates of the party he prefers most. In the Wiesbaden case, as for all cities in Hess, the maximum number of votes that can be given to a candidate is three. So he can give some candidates three votes, some two, some only one and no votes to the rest. In doing so, the voter can ignore the order of the list and give votes to candidates he prefers most, even if they have a low position on the list.
c. Finally, the voter can even distribute his votes over candidates from more than one list.

The obvious advantage of this way of voting is that the citizen can take into account the degree to which he supports the set of preferences of a specific party or candidate. Of course this requires that the voter has some political competencies: to reap all the advantages of this voting technique a voter must have reliable information on the political views of the candidates, and the capacity to weigh this information. It is yet to be seen how many of the voters actually have these competencies.

The decision to change the electoral system in this way is in Germany beyond the formal capacities of local governments. The local electoral system falls under the jurisdiction of the federal states (the 'Länder'). Our information shows that the initiative for this reform came from the level of the states. Innovative politicians and civil servants of the Hess Government introduced this reform as a reaction to the continuous decline of the turn out in local elections.

Our respondents found it difficult to specify very precisely where the initiative came from. The voting system in itself is not new. Länder like Bavaria, Baden-Wurttemberg and, more recently, Rheinland-Pfalz have already used this system for quite some time. Our interviews suggest that reform oriented politicians and civil servants, from various backgrounds, started to propagate it rather recently. The constantly declining turnout rates in local elections demanded a reaction.

Table 2.1. Turn out rate in local elections in Hess (1977 – 2006)

	1977	1981	1985	1989	1993	1997	2001	2006
Turn out rate (%)	80	76	76	78	71	66	53	46

(source: Hessisches Statistisches Landesambt[9])

9 http://www.statistik-hessen.de/themenauswahl/wahlen/daten/kw01/ergebnisse-1946-2006/index.html

To counter this downward trend, the CDU[10] proposed to adopt the new electoral model, as it was used in Rheinland-Pfalz. The other political parties were not enthusiastic, but the media reacted in a positive way, portraying it as an important improvement of the democratic quality of the local elections. This public support made it risky to oppose this reform: no one wanted to be seen as a "reactionary, obstructing democratic innovation". So, eventually, the support for this reform was rather general. The CDU, in coalition with the FDP[11], made this reform part of the coalition's policy programme. The decision was made in 1999 and used for the first time in the local elections in 2001.

According to our respondents the advantage of this new system of voting is clear: it gives the voter more influence on the distribution of seats in the council and it reduces the strong influence of the political parties on this. In the traditional system the order of the list of candidates, as decided by the political party, had in practice a dominating influence on the attribution of seats to candidates. Candidates, low on the proposed list, had a very small chance of being elected. The new model explicitly gives the voters a possibility to neglect the order of the candidates, as decided by the party. They are more or less invited to express variations in their support for specific candidates, some of which may have a low position on the formal list and some of which may even come from another party's list. The assumption is that this will make voting more attractive to the citizens.

The objections to the new system are twofold. First it is stressed that this way of voting is more complex than the traditional one. The fear was expressed that this would lead to a further decline of voting. Also the risk of mistakes, and thus invalid votes, was expected to be rather high. A second objection refers to the diminished influence of the party on the attribution of seats. A party list is usually composed in such a way that required specific talents have a good chance of being elected, by giving them a high position on the list. When voters can easily deviate from the order of the list, the party's representation in the council runs the risk of losing crucial talents. Several interviewed politicians expressed that there is a risk that highly qualified, specialised politicians, with a low popular profile, will loose their position to more popular candidates.

In Wiesbaden the model of 'Kumulieren und Panachieren' was used for the first time in 2001 and for the second time in 2006. The results are disappointing for

10 Christlich Demokratische Union: the Christian Democratic Party.
11 Freie Demokratische Partei; the Liberal Party.

those who hope that this new way of voting will stimulate the electoral participation. Table 1 shows that the decline continues, as if nothing had happened. Yet, most of our respondents hesitate to conclude this demonstrates the failure of the new voting system. They stress that declining turn out rates in local elections are a general phenomenon, in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

According to our respondents, the results of the elections in Wiesbaden since the introduction of the new system do not show many differences from earlier elections, maybe because the majority of the voters does not make use of the new possibilities of the system: in 2001 and 2006 the majority voted in the traditional way.[12]

When we look at the use of the new voting system, we can differentiate between four categories of voters:

a. voters who continue to vote as in the old system: they give all their votes to the preset party list (the ‘Listenkreuz’);
b. voters who give all their votes to candidates of one party, but make use of the possibility to favour specific candidates by giving them more than one vote, and no votes to other candidates;
c. voters who give some votes to specific candidates and the rest to one party list;
d. voters who freely distribute their votes over candidates from various lists.

Table 2.2. Voting behaviour in Wiesbaden, 2001 and 2006 (in percentages of votes)

	A. Traditional (‘Listenkreuz’)	B. ‘Listenkreuz’, with changes to the party list	C. Some votes for selected candidates, and the rest to one party	D. Votes distributed over various candidates/parties
2001	56	21	14	9
2006	57	17	16	10

The first category (57%) is in 2006 the biggest by far. The last category contains only 10% of the voters. These figures do not show much enthusiasm for the new model. Reform oriented respondents suggest that the electorate still has to get used

12 The data on Wiesbaden are selected from the publications of the Amt für Wahlen, Statistik, und Stadtforschung (office for elections, statistics, and city research) of the city of Wiesbaden.

to the new model. Critics see these results as proof of their fear for the complexity. Their interpretation is that the voters do not have the knowledge required for optimal use of the new system.

Additional arguments are derived from the experience in other municipalities in Hess[13]. The results of these municipalities suggest that the new model is most appreciated in smaller towns. In the smaller towns 55% of the voters, against 40% in the bigger cities, used the new technique. This is generally interpreted as a consequence of the higher level of information that voters in smaller towns have: they know the candidates better than their fellow voters in bigger cities. Our interviewees have the impression that citizens in the big cities, who make use of the new system, tend to vote on the basis of 'non-political' characteristics, like gender, level of education, neighbourhood, or social status.

A last important result of the changes in the voting system seems to be an increase of invalid votes, due to the complexity of the voting procedure, as feared by some critics. If we look at the data on Wiesbaden, we see a small increase of the numbers of invalid votes. (Between 1981 and 1997 this figures varies between 1.6 and 3.1 percent; in 2001 it is 3.4 and in 2006 4.9 percent.)

Analysis

So what answers does Wiesbaden give to our research questions? The first question refers to the underlying problem analysis. The constantly decreasing turnout rate at local elections is clearly the main concern. It is seen as a consequence of a decreasing interest in politics. By introducing this new technique the authorities hope to make voting more attractive.

The second research question ("what happened") is discussed in detail above. The reform project seems to have been implemented rather easily. Once proposed by some innovative politicians and civil servants and successively supported by the media, changing the voting technique was seen as the proper thing to do. It was "not done" to oppose this innovation.

The third question focuses on the results. Our findings suggest that the introduction of the system of Kumulieren und Panachieren did not bring what was hoped for. The decline of turnout rates continues. Some protagonists of the new method claim that it will take some time before the voter is familiar with this new voting system.

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13 Data provided by the Hessisches Statistisches Landesamt.

Even though direct positive results are not visible, almost all respondents are moderately satisfied with this reform. In their view it makes the elections more democratic; the voter is given a better chance to express his preferences for specific candidates and the strong influence of the political parties on the lists (especially on the order of the candidates) is broken. They see possibilities to improve the new technique, in order to reduce the number of invalid votes, or more generally, to make it less complicated for the citizen.

The introduction of the new voting technique does not seem to be the result of a profound discussion on democratic reform. The atmosphere around the reform is rather pragmatic: "We have to do something about the low electoral turn out".

A remarkable element in this reform is that the majority of our respondents spoke in positive terms about the reduction of the influence of the political party on the selection of candidates. The voter now has a much better chance to deviate from the order of the list as produced by the political party. Some mentioned that this might lead to loss of quality (see above). But the general sentiment is positive toward this decreased influence of the party. A remarkable implicit comment on the role of political parties in modern day representative systems: the membership of political parties has decreased so much, that their role in the system of representation is challenged.

4.2. Almere: citizens and representatives meeting on the Political Market[14].

In 2002 the Dutch parliament decided to start a process of reform in local democracy called '*dualisering*' (dualisation: the introduction of political dualism). This process aimed at revitalising local democracy by clarifying the position of the local council and the local executive (Hendriks and Schaap 2010). Under the then applicable regulations council and executive more or less shared the task of governing a municipality. Officially the council was the highest political authority and the executive body had the task to prepare policies and regulations, to present them to the council and successively administer them. The system was called 'monistic', since the aldermen (all members of the executive body apart from the appointed mayor) remained members of the council. In practice, however, the leading role of the

14 The 'Political Market' of Almere will also be mentioned in chapter 3, though from a different perspective: the role of a local council in participatory democracy.

council as the highest local authority was seldom realised. The executive body was often seen as dominating the council. And the governing majority coalition in the council, amongst which the aldermen, usually found itself limited by the coalition agreements and not really free in critically following the executive.

In the eyes of the Dutch parliament and government this was one of the most important reasons for the lack of public interest in local politics. By disentangling council and executive, a more independent role of the council would become more real and local politics would have a better chance to become lively and interesting to the public. So, the tasks of the council and the executive were redefined. The council remains the highest public authority in a municipality, but is supposed to leave the daily running of the municipality to the executive body. The task of the council is to focus on the strategic issues of local policies and administration

Thus freed of the executive burden, the council should use its energy for holding the executive accountable for their performance in lively political debates. Also, it was assumed, that the council would have more time and energy to actively seek contact with the local community and to give more meaning to their representative function. To be realistic: many practitioners and academics in Dutch public administration were sceptical about this process of dualisation and the assumptions on which it was based. But this is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of the 'dualisation' of Dutch local government.

In 2004, the local council of Almere decided that the fulfilment of the expectations of the process of dualisation required some extra steps. If local politics really had to become more lively, understandable and interesting to the public, legal reforms of the law on dualisation of local government were not enough. The working procedures of council and executive were in need of drastic revision. Almere chose to do so by working along two lines.

First, the system of lengthy deliberations in commissions and council meetings had to be replaced. These meetings which tended to last many hours, often till deep into the night, were considered to be extremely boring.

Second, the citizens ought to have a better chance to participate in meetings of the public authorities, and to have influence on the agenda. The changes in the procedures should, therefore, include well-structured modes for engaging the citizens in the public debate.

The council hopes to realise this by replacing the old system of council and committee meetings by an event called the 'Political Market'[15]. The councillors now meet weekly, and citizens are invited to participate. The Political Market consists of two parts. In the first part, early in the evening, a series of short meetings on specific issues are held. Citizens, councillors, aldermen and civil servants decide themselves in which of these meetings they will participate. Citizens have the right to participate in these meetings. This is the so-called 'carrousel'. The purpose of these meetings is to gather and discuss information, and to prepare decision-making. Citizens do not only have a right to speak during these meetings but can also exercise influence through a 'citizen's initiative' to put an issue on the agenda. During the second part of the evening, the council meets for debate and/or decision-making.

This Political Market is meant to revitalise the representative system. It focuses on restoring the contact between citizens and their representatives and on stimulating interest and knowledge about what is going on in local politics. It also seeks to (re-)establish legitimacy and leadership of the elected politicians.

Almere's experiment drew a lot of attention in the Netherlands and a number of municipalities copied this model in one way or another.[16] The municipality itself has, of course, evaluated this experiment.[17] These evaluations show that local civil servants and politicians find the Political Market a fine instrument for intensifying the contact between citizens and politics. The citizens who have participated in the Political Market have a more positive view on politics and administration than those citizens who did not participate, so – a critic might comment – "the Political Market is mainly attractive to those citizens who already had a positive attitude toward politics". The level of trust in politics has not been raised, but the number of citizens visiting the meeting of the council has increased slightly (no exact figures are presented). Yet many citizens are still unaware of the possibilities for participation, which the Political Market offers. The participating citizens find that local politics has become more lively, interesting and accessible. As weak points the evaluations

15 http://gemeenteraad.almere.nl/politieke_markt

16 In an annex containing the evaluations of the Political Market the municipality's website mentions 4 other municipalities which make use of some form of political market; also the website states that in the first year and a half of the experiment more than 1,300 guests from other politico-administrative organisations visited the market.

17 All evaluations are written in Dutch. July 31, 2007: http://gemeenteraad.almere.nl/sitemap/gemeenteraad_content/_pid/kolom1-1/_rp_kolom1-1_elementId/1_1350452

mention that the Political Market makes a somewhat messy impression and suffers from lack of time. Also proposals for improving some organisational aspects were formulated.

Our interviews taught us that the idea of the Political Market is not really controversial. Although not all councillors and civil servants were in favour of this reform, there has been no real opposition against the plan. Now, it is more or less generally accepted and seen as fitting with the innovative mood, which suits a young city like Almere[18]. The origin of the plan for the Political Market is, according to our respondents, to be found inside: the registrar of the council, Mr. J. Pruim. He is almost unanimously mentioned as the person who deserves the credits. The positive attitude of the mayor, Mrs. Annemarie Jorritsma, towards the project was also frequently mentioned.

The general atmosphere in the interviews, among civil servants, councillors and representatives of the civil society, was benevolent. Although the Political Market has not (yet) led to a real increase of political participation, the relationship between citizens and the council has improved in quality. In addition, the Political Market also serves some other goals, like intensifying the contact between councillors through more frequent meetings, and making decision-making more efficient and less slow. Here, again, the experiment is seen as having the desired effects. Perhaps more importantly, the Political Market is seen as the starting point for a cultural change, stimulating openness and an innovative mood regarding the relationship between citizens and politics. And, of course, Almere enjoys the positive publicity it receives from the Political Market.

Analysis

Answering research question 1 in summarising terms, this reform project clearly focuses on changing the role of the council, as an answer to the shared impression that the public has lost interest in representative politics. The procedures of the council are taken as the starting point. They are supposed to make the work of the council boring, difficult to understand and thus unattractive to the citizens. By making the process of political deliberations quicker and more open to citizen participation, the city of Almere hopes to revitalise interest in local representative politics. This seems a rather limited answer to the problem of political alienation, but in

18 Almere is a new city, built on one of the Dutch “polders”. The first houses were built in 1975.

chapter 2 Edwards describes how Almere combines this strategy of representative reform with other more participatory efforts to reach the public and the civil society.

What happened when the project started (question 2)? Again, as in Wiesbaden, once the idea was created and supported by strong local leaders, the implementation was not very problematic. Although some members of the local council are still critical about it, the Political Market is widely accepted in Almere. After its introduction, the city evaluated the Political Market. This evaluation did not lead to serious changes to the model, since most interviewed citizens seemed pleased with the innovation. The interviewees, however, were people who visited the Political Market, not the many citizens who still stayed away: the number of citizens attending the meetings of the council did not really increase.

So as for results (research question 3), this presents a rather mixed picture. In quantitative terms the introduction of the Political Market has been unsuccessful. The number of participating citizens has not increased and those participating are not a cross-section of the electorate, but rather “the same old suspects”. In addition, we found no evidence that councillors are now better informed about the electorate’s preferences. In qualitative terms, however, a positive step seems to be set by the creation of an appealing political infrastructure, which stimulates discussions about reform not only in Almere but also in many other Dutch cities.

As in Wiesbaden, it is probably too early to pass a final verdict on the Political Market of Almere. Winning back the attention of the public will probably take more than just one innovation. To change a culture of political disinterest more time and more changes will be needed.

4.3. Newham: the influential councillor.

Some years ago, the London Borough of Newham opted for a directly-elected mayor. This direct election, in combination with the local government reforms of the Blair Government, opened the way for the development of strong executive leadership[19]. Critics of the directly-elected mayor often stress that this strong executive leadership, in combination with the redistribution of tasks between council and executive as introduced by the Local Government Act 2000, will undermine the position of the local council (Stoker et al. 2007: 48-52).

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19 For an evaluation: Stoker et al. (2007)

However, the first directly-elected mayor of Newham, Sir Robin Wales[20], acted differently[21]. It is his belief that a directly-elected mayor needs "…to work alongside a strong body of councillors, firmly linked to their local communities and acting as the voice of those communities" (Copus 2006: 184). So, instead of looking for direct links with active parts of society via participatory arrangements, the mayor aims to put local councillors at the centre of local politics and have them participate in the execution of his tasks. During the interview, the mayor indicated that he does not expect much from giving direct decision-making powers to the people. "They can tell you what they want, but are not able to tell how to do it." Nevertheless, it is only fair to observe that the introduction of the 'influential councillor' was part of a wider reform policy which also comprised new participatory mechanisms (see for example the community forums, mentioned later on in this chapter).

In order to realise the 'influential councillor concept', the councillors have to be made visible as influential actors, both to the citizens and to the local civil servants. Therefore, efforts are made to position the councillors in the heart of their neighbourhood so as to enable them to assist local organisations and citizens in their activities.

As a part of the 'influential councillor concept', some tasks related to concrete problems in the wards are delegated to councillors. Also, provisions are made for supporting them in the performance of these tasks. This delegation of tasks to councillors is done by the mayor and formalised in targets. It is meant to enhance the visibility of councillors as influential persons in dealing with concrete issues in their wards. In an interview, the Chief Executive Officer of Newham indicated that this delegation of tasks does not imply that the councillors have executive responsibilities. He stated that the tasks are well defined, concrete, and give substance and direction to the councillors' work. This helps to position the councillors as influential actors.

Not all councillors have a special task. Of the present 60 councillors, 32 have such a delegated task. All councillors get an allowance of £7,000. But this allowance increases with the complexity of the tasks delegated to them. Some councillors with a demanding task or councillors with a portfolio that demands a more or less full-time commitment, receive allowances of up to £30,000.

20 Elected in 2002.

21 The description of the influential councillor by Colin Copus (Copus, 2006), has been of great value for this case study.

The mayor has a free hand in deciding about the delegation of tasks. The fact that almost all councillors come from the same party as the mayor (54 of the 60 are Labour, like the mayor) is probably helpful. A critical council member remarked that this delegation of tasks is in conflict with the independence of the Council. He complained that the mayor acts as "judge and jury" on the performance of the councillors.

In addition, the councillors benefit from well-organised links with the 'community-forums'. A community forum is a structure that looks very much like a well-structured and formalised neighbourhood council, with a clear set of tasks. The way these forums are regulated[22], suggests that Newham takes these structures very seriously. These community forums are a means of stimulating participation of the population in public affairs.

The councillors are members of the forum's steering group. The position of the councillors obtains an extra dimension since it has been decided that councillors will be consulted on all plans regarding their ward and forums[23]. One of their most important contributions to the forums is that they act as mediators between, on the one hand, the population and its forums and, on the other the local civil service and the council. One of our respondents indicated that the councillors tend to focus on the relatively 'small' issues, which are of big importance to people, issues which tend to be neglected in the more distant and abstract general local policies. Another respondent, a councillor, stressed that the 'influential councillor concept' has brought the councillors in much closer contact with citizens and, at the same time, with relevant civil servants. This has improved both her knowledge of what lives among the people and about what is going on in town hall. Various interviewees indicate that these links with the forums and the civil service contribute to the visibility and prestige of the councillors and enhances the level of their local knowledge.

According to most of our respondents the 'influential councillor concept' works well. The implementation of the idea requires little legal or organisational reform. It was mostly a matter of strengthening specific dimensions in the traditional role of the councillor. The most important difference with the old situation is that, in the words of one of the interviewed councillors, the councillors are really taken seriously now, and are no longer treated as unimportant. This means that the most sig-

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22 See the official website of the Newham Community forums http://apps.newham.gov.uk/communityforums/, for information regulations etcetera.

23 Newham has 20 wards and 9 community forums. Each ward elects 3 councillors.

nificant change was a cultural change. The civil service and the citizens had to get accustomed to these new, stronger and more influential councillors.

As indicated above, councillors from opposition parties complain about the tight link between the mayor and the councillors, which results from the system of delegation of tasks and the associated extra allowances. These critical council members do not seem to be convinced about the strengthening of their position. In their view, the decision-making power of council members has not been increased; the councillors at present are used to support, in words and deeds, the policies of the mayor. But then again, these critics form a very small minority in the council (6 out of 60) and in the last local election none of them were re-elected: the Newham council is 100% Labour now[24].

Analysis

How can the nature of this reform project be characterised (research question 1)? The 'influential councillor concept' is an effort to strengthen the position of councillors as local leaders. This is done by making them mediators between the municipality and their wards and neighbourhoods. Little fundamental change was needed to realise this. The concept rests mainly on reasserting and strengthening the existing rights and position of councillors, aided by cultural change that is oriented to making them visible and known as influential actors, both to citizens as well as the local civil service. The strong support of a dynamic mayor, the originator of the concept, was and still is vital to this.

A remarkable aspect of the concept is the delegation of tasks. This seems to contrast with the process of disentanglement of the council and the executive (from monism to dualism), which is also a common trend in the United Kingdom. Officially this delegation is not seen as giving executive responsibility to the councillors. The responsibility remains in the hands of the mayor and the delegated tasks offer little room for discretion. The Influential Councillors, thus, act as front line officers of the municipality of Newham. The actual work is done, behind the screens, by the local bureaucracy, but the visibility of the councillors as 'problem solvers' contributes greatly to their credits as influential actors.

Another interpretation, closer to the tradition of representative politics, is also possible: the councillors perform 'ombudsman' activities. But if one takes into ac-

24 http://mgov.newham.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx

count that the councillors perform tasks, delegated, supervised and evaluated by the mayor, this interpretation ceases to be convincing.

The pragmatic nature of this reform is also important. It does not seem to be based on an in-depth analysis of local democracy, and constitutional issues like monism and dualism. In fact, it seems to be in contradiction with the trend to increase dualism in local governance. The mayor, in a very pragmatic way, concluded that he needs the eyes, ears and hands of the local councillors to tackle the serious social and economic problems of his community in an effective way.

The implementation of the Influential Councillor Concept (research question 2) is greatly facilitated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the councillors come from the same party as the mayor (Labour)[25]. If this was not the case, the delegation of tasks among council members might end in complicated and politicised discussions on "who gets which tasks and about how they should be performed".

The process of creating strong links with civil society, with the Community Forums, may have benefited too from this 'all-labour' climate. Councillors and Community Forums share a common political background. Without this the leading role of the mayor over the activities of elected councillors might become a source of political problems. The critics of the Influential Councillor Concept stress this point, but they are small in number in this Labour stronghold.

An important factor in the implementation process is also that Sir Robin Wales is the first directly-elected mayor of Newham. This makes him a strong, almost dominant actor in the local politico-administrative arena. This strong position, in combination with his personality, has been of great importance for the introduction of the concept and, more specifically, for making the local administration more attentive to the needs and requests of the councillors, as mediators between society and political system. The importance of local leadership is amply demonstrated in the Newham case.

The result of this mayoral project (research question 3) is generally judged in positive terms. Most of the councillors and civil servants we spoke indicated that the councillors' position has indeed improved. If these perceptions are realistic, this would be an important result, especially when one takes into account the doubts about the influence of the 2000 Act on the position of councillors (Stoker et al.

25 At the time of the case study 54 of the 60 councillors were Labour. In 2010 Labour won all the seats in the council.

2007: 52). Whether this increased influence of the Newham councillors is true or not: the result of the "influential councillor" innovation has a clearly positive effect on those involved, which seems to unleash new energy in the local representative system.

Newham teaches us some important lessons: it is possible to revitalise local representative politics by simple means, by taking the rights and the position of councillors as mediators between the municipality and its citizens seriously. Newham also shows how a dynamic personality, like the mayor, can instil new energy and trust into a community, which desperately needs political leadership. The Newham 'influential councillor concept' tries to combine energetic political leadership, often associated with strong individual leadership, with a more democratic interpretation of leadership as a joint responsibility of the mayor and the elected councillors. Whether this has lead to a real increase in influence is a matter of debate: the increase in influence seems to be related to a partial incorporation of councillors into the executive: as "agents" of the mayor. If one shares this somewhat critical observation, the conclusion might be that the there is a certain level of symbolism around this increased position of councillors: they are more visible now as parts of the system of governance. But even then: this increased position (read: visibility) can contribute to their capacity to represent and promote the interests of their voters.

5. Conclusions and reflections

The three cases of democratic renewal, which we have described above, in combination with the considerations in the introductory section of this chapter, suggest the following answers to our three research questions. Also, some more general observations will be presented.

a. Question 1: the nature of the problem

A first conclusion under this heading is that in all of the investigated cases, the problem analysis underlying the reform project is focused on weaknesses of the elected council. The councils are evaluated negatively: uninspiring, not representing the voter's opinion, not in touch with the 'real problems' of citizens. As a result, the citizens are supposed to have lost interest in local politics. The most mentioned causes are of a technical or procedural nature (Wiesbaden and Almere). In Newham

the problem is defined in more structural terms. The problem is the weak position of councillors (both towards citizens and local bureaucrats).

Our second conclusion is that in all investigated cases, there is concern about the low (electoral) participation, interest and involvement. But this concern does not seem to be very deep. The ease with which the lack of success is accepted in all three cases suggests that low participation is taken for granted, as something we have to learn to live with. The viability of the representative system is not questioned. The mission is to revitalise it by improving the quality of the processes of representation and representative behaviour.

Following from these observations the problem statement for all three cases can be formulated in general terms: as a result of structural, procedural or technical reasons, the representative system has lost its attraction. Therefore, citizens show little readiness to participate in local politics. Given this problem statement, the solution has to be found in procedural, organisational and technical improvements of the existing system: a pragmatic rather than a fundamental attitude toward local representative democracy.

One could remark that this is a meagre problem statement when taking into account what we do know about the causes of non-participation and alienation of citizens, and about the gap between citizens and politicians. It is beyond this chapter to summarise the vast literature on this, but the lack of attention to socio-psychological, sociological, and political factors of alienation and non-participation is striking. In addition, the more fundamental knowledge about structural weaknesses in the representative system (see above) plays no role.

The concrete renewals in the three cases indeed follow the pragmatic line, sketched above. The reforms seem to be based on three strategies:

a. *be attractive to the citizen*: stimulate more interesting and understandable political debates, clearly relevant to the citizens,
b. *activate the citizen*: offer possibilities to actively get in touch with the work of the representatives, and
c. *get involved in societal networks*: invest in better links with the citizens/voters.

This first strategy, “be attractive”, is most clearly applied in Almere, where the improvement of the procedures of the council and the quality of the debate is the focal point. This is done by replacing the traditional *modus operandi* with a more dynamic, accessible and transparent way of decision-making and debate. Also ele-

ments of the second strategy, “activate the citizen”, are clearly visible: the Political Market is introduced to lower the threshold for active participation of citizens in the representative process (the right to speak during meetings, introduction of citizen initiatives to get issues on the agenda). The third strategy is not really very important in Almere, although some references are made to this strategy when respondents remark that the new style of politics helps them in building and maintaining contacts with citizens and civil society.

Wiesbaden only follows the “be attractive strategy”. The act of voting is taken as a starting point and the reform tries to offer the citizens a more attractive way to express their preferences. As a result, it is hoped that the representative process would become more recognisable and interesting. Officially it was anticipated that this more attractive way of voting would stimulate participation (second strategy). In comparison, the Wiesbaden approach to renewal is less comprehensive than the approach chosen by Almere and Newham. It is limited to the act of voting and introduced in a rather pragmatic way.

The ‘influential councillors’ in Newham mix the first and the third strategy, when they try to be attractive by showing that they and their council really matter; that they can help in solving problems. This “be attractive strategy” has to be implemented by a networking offensive, by making the councillors central figures in neighbourhood networks (‘community forums’). The actual functioning of the council is not addressed. But its relationship with the civil service is one of the building blocs of the Influential Councillor Concept: the mayor has to take measures to assure adequate support of the councillors, when assisting citizens in dealing with their problems.

The low levels of political participation and interest in local politics are more or less accepted as inevitable. The revitalisation is sought in concrete activity: show that councillors do matter. Often this “turn to the concrete” leads to experiments with devolution of power to the problem owners. Not so in Newham: here the representatives remain central and act as mediators between the local government (especially the elected mayor) and the citizen.

In retrospect, it is interesting to see that in all three cases the low levels of participation and involvement are part of the problem statement, while at the same time this participatory element is in none of the cases directly targeted. A probable cause of this is the meagre problem analysis. If one defines the problem in simple, mono-causal terms, only simple, mono-causal solutions will be found.

b. Question 2: what happened?

Probably as a consequence of this pragmatic orientation on democratic renewal, the implementation of the three innovations proceeded rather smoothly. No strong opposition had to be countered. In fact, it looks as if the projects quickly acquired the status of ‘the right thing to do’. Opposing them was tantamount to conservatism. And especially in Almere and Newham, the effect of local leadership can be observed. In both cities the reform projects were strongly supported, if not inspired, by strong local leaders.

Apart from this it is interesting to observe how the projects became motors of their own success. Since they attained the status of ‘the right thing to do’, and thanks to the support of local leadership, the projects in Almere and Newham have developed into objects of local pride. The feeling that something new and important was going on seems to have stimulated the people involved. And the national attention, especially for the Political Market in Almere, contributed to these good feelings. This observation is not meant to be flippant about what happened. On the contrary: the simple fact that at least an effort is made, appears to stimulate people to change their attitudes toward local politics.

c. Question 3: the results

The cases we selected were supposed to give answers to three dimensions of the representative system: voting, representing and governing. Looking at the results, a remarkable picture emerges.

In all cases the people involved seem to be pleased with the reform, perhaps mostly in Newham and Almere, but also in Wiesbaden. In itself, this is an important result. It stimulates the vitality of the local political community and “fertilises” the ground for further innovations.

But at the same time, the objective results are somewhat disappointing. The improvement of the way to express preferences by reforming the electoral system (voting) has been realised in theory, but is only used to a very limited degree by the voters in Wiesbaden. The councillors in Newham claim to be more actively involved and visible to their voters, but there are serious doubts about the effect of this on their political influence (governing) vis-à-vis the clearly strengthened position of the mayor. And in Almere political life may have benefited from the enthusiasm of reform, but no evidence was found of a real improvement of representation, since the reform has not led to the introduction of new participants, with new views on local policies.

Increased participation and involvement?

As we remarked above, of the three cases Wiesbaden aimed most clearly at increasing electoral turnout however, unfortunately, without success. In reaction, politicians and civil servants now defend the reform by stressing the improved electoral choice, which may make politics (in the long run) more attractive, but mainly by describing it as a correct improvement, as the proper thing to do. The low turnout is accepted as something characteristic of modern society. This is somewhat different in Almere. Although there is no evidence of increased participation or trust, signs of some revitalisation can be perceived: the new procedures seem to have contributed to the liveliness of political debates in the council. But to be fair: the quantitative results are far from impressive. In Newham the hopes for improving electoral participation were not high from the beginning. Low electoral participation seems to be an accepted phenomenon. The impulses for participation in Newham are focused on the 'community forums': citizens are stimulated to get involved in these networks and invited to use these as paths for communication with the municipality: civil society instead of individual participation.

Qualitative Improvements?

In conclusion, we find little success in stimulating participation in the representative democratic process. Nevertheless politicians, administrators and active citizens in all three cases indicate that they are pleased with the reform. The *quality of local politics* (debates, relevance, voting) has increased. In Newham and Almere new energy has been unleashed and a revitalising effect on political life. The general feeling in Almere is that the reform is a success. On quantitative grounds such a conclusion is not really possible. But those who participate in the Political Market indicate that they like this reform. Observed from some distance, the success of the experiment is most of all the emergence of an innovative attitude, stressing openness and responsiveness towards citizens. Our respondents in Newham also indicate that they consider the introduction of the influential councillor concept as an important positive development. It does bring councillors and citizens in closer contact. But the way in which it works is remarkable: councillors are, to a certain degree, transformed into agents of the strong elected mayor, who uses the council as an instrument for communication and implementation of his social reform policies. The results of Wiesbaden are unclear in this respect: the increase in the quality of choice is combined with a higher percentage of invalid votes.

d. The central research question
To what degree is reform of the representative democracy a meaningful strategy for solving problems in local democracies?

On the basis of the answers to our three research questions, the central question of this study can now be answered. And the answer can be moderately positive: to a varying degree, all three cases show that the classical model of representation offers possibilities for democratic revitalisation. In all three cases those involved find the renewal of their local democracies relevant to local problems of democracy. Politics has become more attractive in Almere, more directly linked to the needs of the people in the wards of Newham. And voting in Wiesbaden has changed in such a way that the voter is less restricted in the expression of his preference than before, when political parties 'dictated' the lists. But in view of the limited degree to which these successes were realised, we need to qualify this answer.

1. *Ownership*: the limited impact of the reform in Wiesbaden seems to suggest that top-down reform, not based on locally defined problems and solutions, is problematic; especially, when it does not fit into an existing programme of democratic reform. The Wiesbaden (or should we say Hessian) reform was not supported by follow-up activities at the local level.

2. *Leadership*: In the cases of Newham and Almere, the role of leadership was very clear. One or two persons made it their task to promote the reform and to monitor, facilitate and stimulate the implementation of the reform plans. Most of all these reform leaders acted as the 'carriers of the creed', the inspirers of the new model. The importance of a leading personality already surfaced in our earlier studies (Daemen and Schaap 2000). More generally, the support from an elite group or 'avant-garde' of committed politicians, civil servants and active citizens contributes to successful reform.

3. *Realism*: We can only call the three reform efforts successful when we accept limited participation as a fact of life. A 'revisionist view of participation' seems to dominate the debate among practitioners: 'It is unrealistic to expect large groups of citizens to be active all the time. Rather, we have to create representative political systems that are attractive and accessible for citizens *at the moment they decide to become active*.' If one accepts this view, the quantitative effect is not the most important criterion. A more qualitative target seems more relevant: the creation of a system that is seen as useful and accessible to citizens. A system that 'is available when wanted'. But, of course, not everybody will accept this view on participation.

4. *Pragmatism:* The three projects do not excel in the depth of their problem analysis. All the energy is invested in finding workable solutions. Especially the Almere and Newham cases demonstrate a 'hands-on', innovative attitude. In the absence of proven strategies for democratic renewal, this is probably the best way to proceed: an incremental, searching strategy, leaving room for constant adaptation and able to stimulate energy and enthusiasm.

5. *Cultural change*: In none of the cases very profound structural changes were introduced. Small 'corrections' to the existing system appear to be sufficient to realise some positive effects. The most important factor was the degree to which the new *modus operandi* was positively accepted and applied. A spirit of innovation has to be stimulated. This converges with our observations on the relevance of leadership, above. And the other way around: the absence of such a spirit of innovation might also explain the limited success of the Wiesbaden reform. It is remarkable that in our three cases no strong links, let alone conflicts, with other forms of democratic renewal were reported. The Almere reform was linked to the ongoing process of dualisation. In Newham the mayor explicitly stated that he did not have much belief in processes of empowerment or in direct democracy. And the Wiesbaden reform was also not linked to other processes of democratisation.

In general, our respondents did not express a lack of trust in the representative form of democracy. The representative model just needs some more or less technical improvements, which may not lead directly to higher levels of participation, but which will raise the quality of the representative process. The idea is that it will make the system more attractive and more open for the citizen, when he or she decides to become active. This justifies the conclusion that the model of representative democracy can still inspire renewal of local democracy, not with grand changes, but rather by constantly adapting to the life style of modern citizens and by stressing the ideals of representative politics like openness, transparency, and an orientation on the citizen.

Of course, we can easily criticise these three projects for their lack of attention for what we know about the weaknesses of representative democracy and the causes of citizen's alienation and non-participation. The pragmatism of the three projects has led to rather simple problem analyses, to rather technical answers and to easy satisfaction with meagre results. This pragmatism, however, may be the cause of what makes these three cases inspiring: the energy and enthusiasm with which innovative politicians, civil servants and citizens engaged themselves in taking small-steps toward a more attractive system of local representative democracy.

List of respondents

A. Wiesbaden and Hessen

Interviews: July, 2007

3 Civil servants working for regional political bodies (Mr. Kaiser and Mr. Ruder, Hessischer Landkreistag, and Mr. Schlemp, Hessischer Stadtetag); 2 officials of political parties (Mr. Steibli, SPD and Mr. Gremmels, SPD); 3 civil servants of the Hess Government (Mrs. Dorlinger, Mr. Meireis and Mr. Wolf).

B. Newham

Interviews: July, 2007

Sir Robin Whales (mayor); Chris Wood (Chief executive); Debby Forde (Head of member services); Paul Harris (civil servant; manager public realm); Martin Gibbs (civil servant; member services manager to the council); and 6 local councillors (Richard Crawford, Tristan Fluerty, Ayub Korom Ali, Kay Scoresby, Pat Sheekey, and Eugene Waters).

C. Almere

Interviews: July, 2007

Annemarie Jorritsma (mayor); Jan Dirk Pruim (registrar of the council); AnneKristie Hoogbruin (dept. registrar); Boukje Elgersma (civil servant: policy advisor); Vivian Vijn (civil servant: communications advisor); Martine Visser (alderman); 4 local councillors (Willem Gasman, Frits Huis, Martin Wiegertjes, Klaas Wolzak); and 3 active citizens (Mr. Traarbach, Mrs. Hoekendijk, Mr. Visser).

Chapter three

Tensions and New Connections between Participatory and Representative Democracy in Local Governance

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1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, local authorities in many European countries have introduced new participatory forms of policy-making in an attempt to reverse perceived downward trends in political participation (Daemen and Schaap 2000; Akkerman, Hajer and Grin 2004; Zittel and Fuchs 2007). Such initiatives are marked by inherent tensions. The new arrangements should be set-up in such a way that they can address the alleged crisis of legitimacy in local democracy. This implies that they should provide citizens with enough scope for effective participation. On the other hand, it would be unusual for political elites to endorse reform strategies that they perceive as threatening their own 'political primacy'. For example, experiences with 'interactive governance' in the Netherlands indicate that politicians find it difficult to adapt to this type of participatory arrangement and to invent new constructive political roles (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000; Edelenbos 2005). This chapter addresses one of the 'puzzles' of local democratic reform: tensions between representative and participatory democracy (see Chapter 1 of this volume). The purpose of this chapter is to explore these tensions within different national institutional contexts and to ascertain how a new balance can be found between these two ideals and forms of democracy.

No enquiry into these tensions can be carried out without considering other reforms in local democracy. In several countries, including the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, major institutional changes have been introduced with regard to the relationship between the council and the executive. These reforms are intended to revitalise the functioning of representative democracy, particularly by addressing problems of transparency and accountability in municipal decision-making. One key

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element in these reforms is a separation of powers, whereby decision-making and administration are concentrated in the hands of the executive and councillors' roles are focused on representation, scrutiny and the formulation of broad policy frames (Goss 2001; Elzinga 2002; Copus 2006). In addition, these reforms take place against the backdrop of a process of de-centring collective decision-making and the emergence of forms of governance that challenge the traditional practices of state-centred policy development and implementation. A growing strand of literature discusses the problem of the democratic deficit that is apparently posed by such governance practices (e.g. Benz and Papadopoulos 2006; Bekkers et al. 2007). Democratization strategies for these governance practices can be based on a conception of democracy that extends beyond the traditional representative model. It is unclear, however, whether governance practices have already yielded full-fledged substitutes for or additions to democratic representation and accountability through representative institutions.

All of these reforms and developments have important consequences for the roles of councillors (Derksen 2000; Hansen 2001; Wilson 2002). Taken together, the separation of powers between the council and the executive, the emergence of governance practices and the introduction of various forms of participatory democracy may result in the marginalisation of the councillors from the local decision-making arenas. An institutional context may emerge that induces local stakeholders and citizens to bypass the councillors and to bargain with civil servants and the executive, and which induces the executive to take the lead in engaging stakeholders and citizens in policy processes without involving the council. In such a context, the potential contributions of councillors to the legitimacy of local political decision-making can become unclear. This raises the question of which strategies councillors should pursue in order to cope with these 'border conflicts', and whether these strategies have the potential to establish new connections between local political decision-making and the lifeworlds of the citizens.

In summary, the following questions are addressed in this chapter:

(1) Which opportunities are citizens offered to participate in local policy processes, and how are councillors involved in these opportunities?
(2) Which tensions occur between participatory and representative democracy, and how are these tensions related to the institutional contexts in which local authorities function?

(3) Which strategies can be pursued by councillors to address these tensions and challenges and to invent new constructive roles?

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the research design. Section 3 elaborates the notion of tensions between representative and participatory democracy. Sections 4 to 6 present the case studies. In each case study, we also address the concrete research questions formulated in Chapter 1 of this book. The three sections start with a short exposition of the institutional background and some developments that were relevant at the time of our data analysis. We do not discuss any possible developments since then. Section 7 discusses the main findings and draws a number of conclusions.

2. Research design

Three local authorities are considered as cases in this exploration, one in Norway (Kristiansand), one in the UK (the London borough of Lewisham) and one in the Netherlands (Almere). All three cities are leaders in participatory democracy within their own countries. The cases are selected from different state traditions: the Scandinavian tradition, the Anglo-Saxon tradition and the Germanic tradition (Loughlin and Peters 1997). We relied on theoretical sampling by selecting cases that represent enough variety for an 'emergent theory' on tensions between participatory and representative democracy (Eisenhardt 1989). Specifically, the three cases vary according to the institutional position of the council and its relationship to the executive. In Kristiansand, political-administrative decision-making is in the hands of the council. The executive is not an autonomous political executive, but a mini-council composed according to a strict proportional system of representation of the parties in the council. Kristiansand thus represents an extreme case (Yin 1989) of 'monism' (i.e. council supremacy). In Lewisham, decision-making powers are in the hands of a directly elected mayor, who appoints an executive of councillors who assist him with decision-making and policy-proposal activities. The powers of the council include scrutiny and community leadership. Lewisham represents an extreme case of 'dualism' (i.e. separation of powers between council and mayor, each having its own electoral mandate). In Almere, the situation is also dualistic, although the mayor is appointed by the Crown and does not have the power to determine the composition of the executive or its policies. Furthermore, the dualisation reforms in the Nether-

lands are focused more on strengthening the role of the council as the central forum for political debate, and the Almere council is a forerunner in implementing this idea in its own practice. Using concepts developed in the literature on 'electronic commerce', we posit the three cases in an ideal-typical trajectory, with the Kristiansand council representing the position of (strong) 'intermediation' between citizens and political decision-making, the Lewisham council that of 'disintermediation' and Almere that of possible 're-intermediation' (Chircu and Kauffman 2001). We predict that tensions between representative and participatory democracy occur in a pure form in Kristiansand, transform into a marginalisation of representative democracy in Lewisham and re-emerge in Almere.

The information used in the three case studies is based on semi-structured interviews with councillors, written documents and information on websites. In each of the three municipalities, a preliminary interview was conducted with a senior officer. Because of practical circumstances, the selection of councillors who have been who interviewed in the three cities (see appendix to this chapter) were composed in different ways:

- In Kristiansand, interviews were held in 2008 with the mayor (Conservatives), the vice mayor (Labour), the political group leader of the Christian Democrats and one councillor of the Liberals. The Conservatives, Labour and the Christian Democrats are the three major parties in the council (with the Progress Party in fourth position). This selection was made by the Head of Staff of the City Council.
- In Lewisham, interviews by email were held in summer 2006 with three Labour (the strongest party) councillors and one councillor of the Greens. They reacted to an initial email sent by the author.
- In Almere, interviews were conducted with the party group leaders of the Labour Party, Liberal Party, Liveable Almere, Christian Democrats and the Greens. This selection was made by the author. The interviews took place in the fall of 2006 and in the period between January and March 2007.

3. The nature of tensions between representative and participatory democracy

In this chapter, we adopt a broad understanding of 'participatory democracy' that incorporates various forms of democracy. It includes the 'pluralist democracy' of

bottom-up forms of citizen involvement such as local interest groups, neighbourhood associations and ad hoc protest groups. It also includes 'deliberative' devices such as roundtable conferences, citizen juries and policy exercises on the Internet, in addition to forms of 'associative democracy' in which service provision is devolved to self-governing associations (Hirst 1994), as well as the 'direct democratic' devices of local referendums and citizen initiatives. In the practices we investigate, participatory democracy is intertwined with representative democracy. In theoretical terms, a distinction could be made between participation aimed at political decision-making by the participants themselves and participation resulting in information to be channelled into the representative process. The only conceivable combination between representative and 'real' participatory democracy would then occur if politicians were to delegate decision-making powers to the participants. The projects discussed in this chapter (and probably in this volume), however, should be characterized according to Arnstein's classic participation ladder (Arnstein 1969), which implies that the politicians are expected to attribute a certain degree of decision-making *influence* to the participants. This involves more than aiming to enrich the information available to the political-administrative system and less than formally delegating decision-making to the participants. This also implies that, even if the participatory projects are apparently aimed by the politicians at enriching the information available for decision-making, they should be assessed in terms of whether there was an appropriate sharing of influence between politicians and participants.

Apart from legitimacy concerns, we see the primary function of participatory democracy as ensuring variety-generating mechanisms (in terms of problem definitions and policy proposals), thereby enhancing the quality and responsiveness of political decisions. Elected politicians keep the ideal-typical role of making value-based selections (Van Gunsteren 2007) by making these selections themselves or by formulating frameworks within which participants can make (initial) selections. The co-existence of representative and participatory devices creates tensions. One of the key questions formulated by the editors of this volume (see Chapter 1) involves the roles that local representatives should play when participatory elements are added to representative local democracy. Politicians must continually balance between their loyalty to their party's platform and conception of the general interest with responsiveness to the concrete concerns and wishes of citizens. These tensions are intensified with the introduction of participatory projects. First, these projects often encompass a multitude of specific issues and involve a variety of participants. This challenges the political primacy of politicians much more than would a single citi-

zen group pressing for a specific issue. Furthermore, these projects have an autonomous existence and commonly span a substantial period, during which participants bring in ideas, discuss alternatives and reach conclusions. Such processes develop their own dynamics, which are difficult to manage in terms of both the 'management of expectations' towards citizens and the process of managing the involvement of the 'political primacy'. The latter is particularly prominent at the end of the process, when the results of the deliberations must be linked to the final political decision-making (Edelenbos 2005).

Klijn and Koppenjan (2000) observe that, although politicians often initiate 'interactive' policy processes, they do not support these processes when they are in progress. Furthermore, the outcomes of the interactive processes often remain unused in the formal political procedures that follow. Politicians seem to view interactive policy-making as a threat to their political primacy. It is obviously necessary to avoid situations in which participants expect politicians to adopt their proposals unaltered. At the same time, politicians should not make their final decisions without using the results of the participatory process. In both cases, tensions occur that are unproductive in terms of 'organizing variety'. Klijn and Koppenjan (2000) proposed possible roles for politicians in interactive policy processes to cope productively with possible tensions. At the start of the process, politicians have a motivating and legitimating role; during the process, they are actively involved in a monitoring and supportive role. At the end of the process, they reconcile points of view and subsequently select and combine alternatives. Politicians can uphold their political primacy in what has become a 'network society' by playing a leadership role in the collective process of exploring common interests. In this way, the relationship between representative and participatory democracy can be seen as mutually supportive (Saward 2001).

4. Kristiansand (Norway)

4.1 Norwegian local democracy

Although Norway is a unitary state, it is relatively decentralised. Norwegian local authorities have traditionally held the power to implement national welfare schemes, adapting them to local conditions. They have obtained a dominant position in the

production and delivery of public services, including childcare, primary education, care for the elderly and cultural services. In recent decades, the municipalities have increasingly been implementing centralised policies (Selle and Østerud 2006).

The structure of municipal government is strongly orientated towards consensus. After the municipal elections, the council (*Bystyret*) that is elected through a system of proportional representation composes a kind of executive (*Formannskap*), again according to a strict system of proportional representation, for which the counting rules are specified in the Municipal Act. This *Formannskap* is not a formal political executive as is a national cabinet of ministers, but a sort of 'mini-council'. There is no formal division of labour in terms of policy portfolios.[26] After the municipal elections, the most important political positions are negotiated between the political parties that will form a kind of coalition. These key positions include the mayor, the vice mayor and the chairs of the council committees.

Political participation through council membership is very widespread in Norway. Aars (2007) mentions that six per cent of the respondents to a local election survey conducted in 2003 reported that they had served as local councillors at some time and that an even greater number had been involved as candidates or members of municipal boards and committees. People also participate in many ways other than through elections. Aars concludes, "Norwegian local democracy has clear features of participatory democracy" (Aars 2007: 205). This picture is enhanced by an earlier study by Aars and Offerdal (1998) on local political recruitment. Turnover is high among councillors in Norway, amounting to 60-65% after each term. This turnover, however, must be explained in terms of a 'process of drift' between various civic activities, including councillorship and activities within civil society. There is a strong culture of civic duty in Norway, combined with instrumental, policy-oriented motives for council work. We conclude that participatory and representative democracies in Norwegian municipalities somewhat overlap social spheres and that the boundaries between the two are not clear-cut.

26 A 'parliamentary system', as it is called in Norway, consists of an executive with aldermen, each responsible for a specific policy area. This type of system exists only in Oslo and Bergen.

4.2 Kristiansand: strong intermediation

Kristiansand is the administrative, business and cultural ‘capital’ of Southern Norway. The present population of 78,000 makes Kristiansand Norway’s fifth largest city. On its website, the municipality reports, “the politicians as well as the administration give priority to participation and dialogue” (kristiansand.kommune.no). Along with four other Norwegian municipalities, Kristiansand participated in the CLEAR-Project of the Council of Europe, which aimed to strengthen democratic participation at the local level.[27] The council consists of fifty-three members.[28] Thirteen councillors are currently sitting in the *Formannskap*. There are five important special committees. A special place is held by the *Kommunal Utvalget*, which supervises the budget and the financial administration of the municipal service delivery. The other four committees are in charge of (1) public health and social affairs, (2) school and kindergarten, (3) city development (‘technical affairs’) and (4) cultural affairs. Of these four committees, the city-development committee deals with often controversial issues that directly affect the physical lifeworlds of residents. It also has the heaviest workload. After the municipal elections in 2007, the Conservatives, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats formed a coalition. The Conservatives obtained the position of mayor and the Social Democrats that of vice mayor, while the Christian Democrats acquired the chairs of three committees, including the city-development committee.[29] In addition to the agreement on key positions, the three parties agreed that they would do their best to draft the yearly budget together and to seek common solutions for all major policy issues.

Neighbourhood associations constitute a backbone for citizen involvement in local affairs in Kristiansand. There is a dense infrastructure of these ‘*Vel*-associations’, in each neighbourhood or even at the level of streets, with umbrella organisations at the level of a quarter or district.[30] Citizens have the opportunity to react to the proposals of the administration that affect their interests. There is a for-

27 In this project, 23 municipalities participated from Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Spain.

28 After the municipal elections in September 2007, the division of seats was as follows: Conservatives 11, Social Democrats 11, Christian Democrats 10, Progress Party 9, Pensioned People’s Party 3, Democrats 2, Liberals 2, Socialist Left Party 2, Environmental Party 1, Red Alliance 1 and Centre Party 1. The turnout was 60%.

29 The *Kommunal Utvalget*, in which the three coalition parties and the Progress Party are sitting, is chaired by the mayor.

30 The Norwegian word ‘Vel’ means ‘well’, as in ‘well-being’.

mal procedure of ‘written hearings’, especially for spatial planning, city development and building issues. Such procedures also exist in other policy areas (e.g. consulting with school boards on education issues), although they are not always formally specified. Citizens can submit their reactions or proposals to the administration as private individuals, *Vel* associations or ad hoc action groups. The administration then drafts a new proposal, which includes the citizens’ input and the administration’s comments. The new proposal is sent to the council committee. At this stage, citizens can present their case to the politicians. The Monday-evening political groups are the most common forum. Depending on the issue, citizens approach those political groups, from which they expect to gain an advocate or to obtain sympathy for their point of view. The proposals are subsequently discussed in the committee and then submitted to the *Formannskap* or directly to the council. In some cases, they are decided upon by the committee itself, if it has the delegated power to do so. The politicians’ attitude towards citizen input seems to be fairly open and flexible:

“When confronted with an alternative proposal, we first consider whether it fits within the plan. If it seems that it does not, we consider whether it would be possible anyway.”

Depending on the basic views of the party, however, a number of bottom lines remain. For example, the protection of private property is essential for the Conservatives. The bottom lines of the Christian Democrats are in the domains of health, culture and education.

In addition to the written hearing procedure on ‘ordinary’ decisions, the municipality organises special participation procedures on broad policy plans. In this section, we consider the drafting process of two district plans and the Strategic Municipal Plan.

For a district plan, working groups chaired by a civil servant were established. An important issue was whether to permit the building of houses in a park. The residents were against this proposal, which provided many people with a specific motive for participation. One of the interviewed councillors recalls:

“We promised the residents that we would ‘listen’ to them. However, only later in the process, we made it clear to them that we had nevertheless the intention to permit building activities in the park.”

In this case, the politicians did not properly perform their initiating role. The same interviewed councillor commented, “We should never do this in this way again”. Politicians learned that they must be explicit beforehand about the frames and limits within which a participatory process can take place.

For the Lund district plan, another procedure was chosen. This time, the council had made a number of decisions on key issues before the process had started, including the controversial issue of moving a part of the harbour to Lund. The municipality set-up an interactive process, in which a few open ‘milestone’ meetings were organised by the municipality, one at the start of the process, a second in the middle and one at the end. Additional meetings were organised by the *Vel*-associations. The municipality facilitated the process with information. The politicians attended and chaired the first meeting, after which the administration took over the process.

“Interestingly, the interactive process we started prompted the emergence of an umbrella coalition of all the Vel-associations in Lund and this organisation got considerable influence on how many themes in the plan have been elaborated.”

The neighbourhood associations proposed an alternative plan, and this plan was included in the draft document. In addition, several ideas proposed by the associations were integrated into the draft. This draft was then submitted to the written-hearing procedure. The politicians subsequently stepped into the process and endorsed the final draft. Nevertheless, a number of residents were disappointed after the procedure, as they had participated with the idea that they could change the decision on moving the harbour. In this case, although the council was clear about the substantive frameworks for the interactive process, this did not prevent tensions from emerging between the objectives of participating citizens and prior decisions made by the council. As Klijn and Koppenjan (2000) point out, substantive terms decided upon by the politicians should not be imposed as directives that cannot be adjusted during the process, except when absolutely necessary. They should rather be seen as flexible frameworks that mark the terrain within which the involved parties can develop their proposals. This requires that politicians remain actively involved in monitoring the process in order to provide further political direction when necessary. In this specific case, however, the tensions were probably inevitable.

In 2004, the city established a participatory procedure for the revision of the Strategic Municipal Plan.[31] In comparison with the previous revision (in 2000), which had also included a participatory procedure, the councillors were more strongly involved in the formulation of priority themes. First, the administration made a document that described a number of themes and challenges. During a two-day workshop, the *Formannskap* formulated the priority themes for the Plan. The city council did the same during a one-day workshop. Based on the input of both workshops, the managers of the administration wrote a draft with four priority themes, which were then discussed and approved in the *Formannskap*. At this point, the participation process started. For each of the four priority themes, a specific group of interest groups, voluntary groups and other stakeholders were invited to workshops or focus groups. Several leading councillors also took part in the meetings. This input was used to develop a draft plan, which was presented to the *Formannskap* and subsequently to the general public in open meetings and during the formal hearing procedure. The final draft was presented to the city council, which then made the political choices. In this process, we observe that the politicians were strongly involved in the agenda-setting stage and in the final decision-making with regard to the policies that were drafted in the sequentially organised interactive process, which involved stakeholders, citizens and the administration. Such procedures are appropriate, provided the council has delegated policy-making to these actors within the established framework of priority themes. Otherwise, it would seem to prevent politicians from playing their roles as selectors of proposals before the final decisions are made. For the coming revision of the Strategic Municipal Plan, a procedural framework has been formulated that commits the politicians more strongly to the interactive process. The administration will regularly report to the politicians, indicating the need for political decisions to provide further direction. This is a further step in involving politicians in the participatory process, thereby connecting the process more thoroughly with the institutions of representative democracy.

The CLEAR report identifies the final feedback to the citizenry about how their inputs have been handled as a persistent weak point (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development 2006). Our impression is that the politicians do not press for such feedback.

31 According to the law, each municipality is required to have a strategic Municipal Plan that must be revised every four years.

We conclude that the participatory projects in Kristiansand, while aimed both at enriching the information that is available to the political-administrative system and creating a broad consensus on specific and sometimes controversial issues, also indicate the problems that the politicians encounter in taking up appropriate roles. The council went through a gradual learning process on how to strike a balance between assigning due influence to citizens' input and giving political direction.

5. Lewisham (United Kingdom)

5.1 Local democracy in the UK

Unlike many other European countries, the English local authorities are not protected by a constitution: "Parliament has the authority to alter local authority structure and operations. Local authorities must be able to adduce specific statutory authority for their actions and have only a limited power of general competence" (OECD 1997: 392). Since the 1970s, there have been tendencies towards centralization. In addition, there has been a shift in the direction to models of individual choice since the 1980s, inspired by New Public Management (Noppe and Ringeling 2000).

For decades, local politics has been losing legitimacy in the UK. As observed by Goss (2001: 118), with voter turnout of around thirty per cent, fewer people vote in British local elections than almost anywhere else in Europe. In the 1980s, the Conservative governments attempted to increase the involvement of citizens in local government by addressing them primarily in their roles as service users. Citizens were invited to participate in the assessment of public services or in the management of organisations involved in public service delivery. The subsequent Labour governments extended this agenda by addressing the citizens in their political roles as well. They included the renewal of the local democratic institutions within their programme to modernise public administration. In its White Paper on local government, the Blair government criticized the traditional committee system for being inefficient and opaque, leading to a situation of distorted priorities and decisions taken behind the closed doors of party meetings (DETR 1998; Noppe and Ringeling 2000). Local authorities were required to separate executive and scrutiny roles. The

new powers of the councillors included scrutiny, 'community leadership' and certain regulatory powers.

The Blair government offered different models for structuring the executive and its relationship with the council (DETR 1998). Most councils opted for the leader-cabinet model, in which the council elects the leader. The other cabinet members are chosen from the members of the council by the council or the leader. Some councils, including Lewisham, opted for a directly elected mayor heading a cabinet. The mayor appoints a cabinet from the members of the council (Wilson 2002). According to Wilson (2002), the Labour reforms, particularly the option of a directly elected mayor, lead to a more elitist decision-making, resulting in the marginalisation of the 'ordinary councillors'. The reforms met with considerable resistance from councillors (Rao 2003; Copus 2006).

5.2 Lewisham: disintermediation of the council

Lewisham is a borough within the Greater London Area, with a current population of 246,000 inhabitants. The Council consists of fifty-four members, three elected by each of the eighteen wards within the borough. Traditionally, the council has been controlled overwhelmingly by the Labour party, but this situation changed somewhat in the local election of 2006.[32] Lewisham was one of the few municipalities in the UK that opted for a directly elected mayor. In 2002, Lewisham elected Steve Bullock as its first directly elected mayor. He has appointed a cabinet of nine councillors to assist with decision-making and policy proposal. Council members who are not in the cabinet have the task of providing overview and scrutiny, for which they form select committees. In the UK, Lewisham has been one of the forerunners in consultation procedures with citizens. In 1995, the Lewisham council introduced the Lewisham Listens programme, which includes citizen juries, citizen panels and community forums.

In Lewisham, there are six *Area Forums*, each made up of three wards. Meetings are arranged by the councillors as a way of listening to discussions about the

32 The division of seats after the election in 2006 was as follows: Labour 27, Liberal Democrats 16, Greens 6, Conservatives 3 and Socialist Party 2. (After the local election in 2010, Labour increased its number of seats to 40).

local issues that concern citizens. Nonetheless, some of the interviewed councillors expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the area forums:

"We currently have an annual forum meeting to cover three wards but there has been a recognition that these have not been effective in involving people in decision-making and are currently being reviewed…. The lack of an effective system of neighbourhood governance in Lewisham acts as a barrier to dealing with local concerns effectively and hopefully this will be rectified following the current review."

Another councillor commented:

"The local area forums are perhaps somewhat controversial. The combination of three wards links together three adjacent areas whose residents may not consider they have much in common with residents of the other two wards. I am not convinced they are a cost-effective way of engaging the public, and certainly they do very little to engage people who are not otherwise in contact with the council."

As indicated above, Lewisham is active in participatory procedures. Because of the strong position of the elected mayor, however, the councillors are only marginally involved in the final decision-making process. For example, in September 2004, a consultation procedure started about the Controlled Parking Zones. A citizen jury addressed the general issue of 'the Place of the Car in Lewisham'. The conclusions were forwarded to the executive, which developed proposals for specific areas. These proposals were discussed with the residents and businesses in the areas. The final decision was taken by the mayor, with a scrutiny moment for the council. The cabinet members are 'less disintermediated' from the decision-making process as are their ordinary ward colleagues. As one of the interviewed Lewisham councillors explained:

"As a cabinet member […] I attended the initial report back of the Citizens Jury and at my quarterly meetings we discussed controlled parking following public consultation. The residents […] voted no to a Controlled Parking Zone and I supported them in this."

As this councillor set out:

"Lewisham has a directly elected mayor and this creates a tension in the role of front line councillors as they do not really have a say on major issues – the mayor decides following advice from cabinet members but in the main proposed by officers. [...] I personally prefer the previous committee system as members of the public could attend committee meetings and there were more co-optees from relevant organisations."

An ordinary ward councillor confirms his marginal role in the consultation procedure:

"On the Controlled Parking Zone consultation ward members were sent some information but there was no major attempt to involve ward councillors. Ditto with the citizens jury. I played a more active role in the consultation on the 20-mph zone, although I was not involved in the overall decision-making process. Although supportive of the overall scheme, I took up a number of local concerns to iron out some glitches and was successful in securing several improvements on behalf of the residents."

The second part of this quote underlines the fact that councillors, while marginalised from the decision-making process, can take on the role of advocate in support of their residents on specific issues. This is also apparent in the following quote:

"We have three Controlled Parking Zones in my ward and a fourth should come on line next year. I have been involved in all the consultations about the parking zones and supported them, as I think they make a vast difference to the quality of life for residents. I have not been involved at all in 'The place of the car in Lewisham'."

We conclude that the Lewisham case points to a simple logic underlying decision-making in an extreme situation of 'dualism': if the centre of decision-making shifts to the executive, tensions between representative and participatory democracy also shift to the executive-citizens interface. The participatory project on the Controlled Parking Zones was aimed to support the executive's decision-making in terms of information and support.

Despite this shift, at least one important role remains for councillors: the role of advocate and broker in support of their residents. For example, in November 2004, one councillor, who was chair of the Environment Select Committee and of the Transport Liaison Committee, organised a public consultation event on travel and transport in Lewisham. This took place on a Saturday in and around a marquee in Lewisham Town Centre. The purpose was to find out why people did not make more use of public transport and to ascertain what they thought the council could do to encourage the greater use of public transport. A video booth enabled those attending to record comments, which were then edited and submitted to the mayor and the cabinet. The third case, the Dutch city of Almere, suggests that this role can indeed become more important within a context of separation of powers, and it can be enhanced by forms of participatory democracy organised by the council itself.

6. Almere (the Netherlands)

6.1 Local democracy in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a ‘decentralised unitary state’. In formal, constitutional terms this means that municipalities have a ‘general purpose autonomy’ to ‘initiate all sorts of policies it considers important for the local community’ (Hendriks and Tops 2003: 302), as well as the capacity to implement, in ‘co-governance’, regulations and policies that are decided at other (usually higher) levels of government. In the course of time, the number of tasks to be fulfilled in co-governance has steadily increased.

The local authority is divided over three bodies: the council (*gemeenteraad*), the board of mayor and aldermen (*college van burgemeester en wethouders*) and the mayor (*burgemeester*). The board functions as a real political executive. The council, elected through a system of proportional representation, is formally the head of the municipality. In the Netherlands, the Crown appoints the mayor. A practice has gradually emerged in which the local council can exert a relatively strong influence on the appointment decision. After the elections, the political parties negotiate the formation of a new executive. Several decades ago, these boards were formed in a way that reflected the distribution of seats in the council. Currently, parties that have a majority make a coalition agreement and develop a common policy programme for the coming term.

Since 2002, Dutch local government has been undergoing a reform process that is aimed at revitalizing the representative institutions. This reform was the result of the recommendations made by a state commission, which pleaded for stronger visibility on the part of local politics (Staatscommissie dualisme en lokale democratie 2000). The commission diagnosed that the most important political decisions took place behind closed-doors meetings of the political groups represented in the council. In particular, the parties forming the majority coalition and the executive had begun to become institutionally intertwined. The reforms were intended to strengthen the councillors' roles as representatives of the local citizenry and to reinstitute the council as the central forum for political debate. The visible changes that were introduced in process of 'dualisation' involved legal changes in the structure of local government (Derksen and Schaap 2004). They included the following:

- The executive and representative roles are separated. The role of the executive is exclusively administration, whereas the council roles are focused on representing the people in terms of establishing general policy frameworks and providing scrutiny. Various administrative competences have been transferred to the executive board. At the same time, the council has received various new instruments for scrutiny, including the right to initiate an inquiry.
- The aldermen are no longer council members. Although they are still appointed by the council, their council membership expires upon their appointment as aldermen. Moreover, aldermen can be appointed from outside the council.
- The council has the right to provide itself with official assistance. A council secretariat (*griffie*) is appointed in each municipality.
- The council elects a 'presidium', which helps to steer the council's agenda.

In the early 1990s, local politicians felt a growing concern about the legitimacy of local government. One crucial factor was the 1990 municipal elections, in which the turnout of just above sixty per cent was perceived as dramatically low and as an ominous sign for the involvement of citizens in local politics. Local authorities responded by trying a variety of devices intended to involve citizens in the policy process. Various experiments gave rise to a deliberative practice of 'interactive governance', which is now a common phenomenon in Dutch local government (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000; Akkerman, Hajer and Grin 2004; Edelenbos 2005). A

number of Dutch municipalities also introduced the referendum as a device of direct democracy. They also embarked on a process of innovation in their delivery of public services, including new instruments for feedback and participation from service users.

6.2 Almere: re-intermediation of the council?

Situated about twenty-five kilometres east of Amsterdam, Almere is a new city with a current population of 173,000 inhabitants. The municipal council consists of thirty-nine members.[33] The executive board is a broad coalition of the Labour Party (two aldermen), the Liberal Party (the mayor and one alderman) and the Christian Union (one alderman). Almere is one of the most innovative municipalities in the Netherlands as regards implementing the dualisation reform agenda.

With strong support from the mayor at that time, the Almere council decided to anticipate the reform at an early stage, by first appointing a council secretary with innovative views on local democracy. In 2004, the council decided to abolish the traditional committee structure and to introduce the 'Political Market'. As outlined in Daemen's chapter (this volume), this reform was aimed at bringing the council closer to the citizens. The Political Market functions as a channel through which citizens can influence local political decision-making. Councillors, civil servants, the mayor and aldermen are directly approachable for citizens. Tight management of the agenda provides clarity and certainty concerning the issues that are to be discussed, as well as when and where. Furthermore, citizens can place an issue on the agenda by gathering at least fifty signatures. A Political Market is organised a few times each year in one of the city's three districts.

Evaluations (Gemeente Almere 2006) indicate that the Political Market attracts more citizens to the town hall. According to the interviewed councillors, two types of citizens visit the Political Market. The first group comprises 'elite participants', most of whom are representatives of organisations and associations and use the Political Market for lobbying. The second group comprises ordinary citizens who are interested in specific issues. For these citizens, the new formula provides a more

33 After the 2006 municipal elections, the division of seats in the Almere council was as follows: Labour Party 12, Liberal Party 7, Liveable Almere 4, Socialist Party 4, Christian Democrats 3, Greens 3, Christian Union 3, Almere Party 2, D66 (progressive liberals) 1, VSP (independent) 1.

inviting environment. Citizens took the opportunity to place issues on the agenda of the Political Market several times. The first initiative involved an attempt by residents to preserve the plane trees in an avenue in their neighbourhood. The second involved an initiative to preserve the 'city meadows'. In both cases, councillors intervened in these issues with the aim of stopping a pending decision in the executive.

Procedures of public participation are organised under the responsibility of the executive within the new system of separation of powers. As a result, tensions between participatory and representative democracy are shifted to the interface between citizens and the executive. Tensions that involve the council can recur if the results of major planning procedures must be presented to the council for final decision-making. Examples include the strategic plans for the various districts. At that final stage, however, it is very hard, if not impossible, for councillors to adopt an appropriate political role. With regard to executive-led public participation procedures, Almere council is attempting to develop a scrutiny role 'at a distance'. In 2005, the local auditor's office, chaired by a board of councillors, published a review of these procedures based on interviews with neighbourhood associations (Rekenkamer Almere 2005). One of the conclusions was that the procedures function rather well in the stage of policy-making, but less satisfactorily in the implementation stage. The report was discussed in the Political Market with the executive. The councillors concluded that their first responsibility is to formulate the procedural frameworks within which public participation procedures should be set-up by the executive. Their second responsibility is to monitor these processes. For the coming period, special attention was to be given to monitoring participation and dialogue with regard to the implementation of public policies. Interestingly, citizens who attended this discussion called for an active monitoring role for the council as a way of shoring up support for participants.

The Almere council also experimented with public participation procedures to feed its role of providing general policy frameworks. In 2003, the council arranged a 'discussion with the city' about youth policy, which had been designated as a special theme in the council programme for that year. The formulation of such special themes was regarded as one of the council strategies in the new dualist system of local government. Discussions were held with the involved organisations and young people in the city. The council formulated a document with policy recommendations for the executive, which incorporated these recommendations into its own policy document. The way in which the executive dealt with the recommendations pro-

voked a discussion with the council. According to the council, the aldermen had gone their own way with the recommendations instead of translating them directly into policy proposals. In this instance, a 'border conflict' emerged between the council and the executive. Such participation procedures can be used by the council to strengthen its role as the main representative institution.

According to one interviewed councillor, the classic tension between representative and participatory democracy did not disappear in the new situation; it was even enhanced somewhat. First, he referred to the Political Market, which tends to diminish the distance between councillors and citizens:

"Politicians must learn to say 'no' to citizens. Citizens are prepared to accept this, if such a 'no' is communicated straightforwardly and with serious arguments."

Tensions also occur in the new participatory arrangements that are organised by the council itself. Recently, the Almere council set up its own citizen panel, which is periodically consulted on specific policy issues. Tensions occur when the majority opinion in the citizen panel runs counter to the prevailing opinion in the council. In 2006, this occurred with regard to the issue of subsidizing professional sports. To the surprise of the council majority, which tended to favour this idea, the citizen panel voted against it. The council obviously owed an explanation when it decided to go its own way. Rejecting a citizens' point of view is compatible with consultation, as long as the rejection is accompanied with argumentation. An institutionalized consultation procedure (e.g. a citizen panel), however, could lose its credibility if this were to occur regularly.

The council had organised the participatory processes that are discussed here, with the aim of supporting and enhancing its roles of representation, establishing general policy frameworks and providing scrutiny. They form a part of the council's new strategies to re-intermediate itself in the decision-making arena. According to the interviewed councillors, these strategies have been relatively successful:

"They have brought a new dynamism in our council work and a better balance of power between the council and the executive."

Citizens were involved by bringing forward their points of view and by participating as discussants. In these practices, tensions re-emerged between participation and representation.

7. Conclusions

The introduction of new arrangements of participatory democracy causes tensions to arise between the legitimate expectations of citizens to have opportunities for effective participation and the equally legitimate role expectations of politicians to be able to exert their political primacy. The aim of this chapter was to explore these tendencies in three local authorities within different institutional contexts, varying in particular with regard to the institutions governing the relationship between the council and the executive. This enabled us to approach the problem of possible tensions against the backdrop of the more general question of how the position of the council can be enhanced as a democratic intermediary in local governance practices and how participatory arrangements can support this process. Three research questions were formulated in the introduction. The first question addressed the opportunities that citizens are offered to participate and how councillors are involved in them. The second question referred to the tensions that occur. Two types of opportunities were described. First, citizens have regular channels through which they can promote their interests. In Kristiansand, these regular practices include the council committees and the meetings of the political groups. In Lewisham, the wards are a regular channel for citizen input, while in Almere, a new infrastructure has been established by means of the Political Market. In these settings, natural tensions occur between the 'pluralist democracy' of bottom-up advocacy and protest and the representative logic of politicians' loyalty to party platforms and policy agreements. In addition to these regular channels, the three local authorities organised participatory processes for specific policy issues or plans. In Kristiansand, these projects support the decision-making of the council. Various tensions emerged in the council-citizens interface. The council underwent a gradual learning process in terms of striking a balance between openness to citizens' input and giving political direction in the participatory process. Tensions can become unavoidable, however, in cases involving key decisions (e.g. the decision to move a part of the harbour), these tensions can be addressed by ensuring appropriate role conceptions on the part of politicians and managing the expectations of citizens, as well as through proper argumentation and feedback.

In Lewisham and Almere, such participatory processes on current policy issues are organised by the executive. These two cases show that the separation of powers between the council and the executive places the councillors at a greater distance

from the political decision-making process. The 'traditional' tensions between participatory and representative democracy shift to the interface between citizens and the executive. Councillors should invent new strategies to re-intermediate themselves in the decision-making arena. This is addressed by the third research question. Goss (2001) defined new councillor roles in terms of caseworker, advocate, broker or facilitator. The cases of Lewisham and Almere provide clues regarding how such roles can be developed further. The mobilization of citizen input for the scrutiny function is one possibility for councillors to reinstate their positions. For example, the Almere council has established 'monitoring groups' (*volggroepen*) for a number of large projects, including projects for restructuring parts of the city. The groups may choose to have discussions with professionals, citizens and experts. By giving the floor to citizens, the council takes on a kind of facilitator role. The scrutiny role also includes monitoring how procedures of participation and dialogue with citizens are carried out by the executive and the municipal agencies. The Almere council also tries to involve citizens by introducing the citizen initiative, discussions with the city and a citizen panel. These forms involve the roles of advocate, broker and facilitator. Tensions between the viewpoints of citizens and those of the councillors re-emerge in these practices.

There is no deterministic relationship between institutional conditions, including such reforms as separation of powers and the directly elected mayor, and the strength of the position of the council as a democratic intermediary. By pursuing intelligent 'middlemen strategies' (Chircu and Kauffman 2001), councillors can successfully bend disintermediation into re-intermediation. Copus (2006: 167) argues that the introduction of the directly elected mayor "eases the tension between governing and representation as it is experienced by the councillor". "Relieved of the need to justify all the actions of the administration to the public, or to oppose them simply because the mayoralty is held by another party, the councillor, even if sharing the political affiliation of the mayor, is in a position to challenge mayoral policy or initiatives for their effect on a specific ward" (p. 169). Although experience must determine whether the system works in this manner, Copus' view underlines the fact that councillor strategies are crucial. Participatory devices can support the councillor in this regard.

Appendix: List of interviews

Lewisham

Kevin Sheehan, Head of Community Governance and Public Management	23-07-2004
Councillor Chris Best, Cabinet member (Labour)	Interview by e-mail August/September 2006
Councillor Darren Johnson (Green party)	Interview by e-mail August/September 2006
Councillor Helen Klier (Labour)	Interview by e-mail August 2006
Coucillor John Muldoon (Labour)	Interview by e-mail August/September 2006

Almere

Anne Kristie Hoogbruin, Deputy Registrar	31-01-2007
Councillor Nico van Duijn (Liveable Almere)	31-08-2006
Councillor Ruud Pet (Green Left)	27-09-2006
Councillor Willem Gasman (Liberals)	24-01-2007
Councillor Klaas Wolzak (Labour, chairman presidium)	31-01-2007
Councillor Rob Beuse (Labour)	15-02-2007
Councillor Nico de Haas (Christian Democrats)	01-03-2007

Kristiansand

Anne Karen Aunevik, head of Staff City Council	23-01-2008
Councillor Per Sigurd Sørensen, Mayor (Conservatives)	23-01-2008
Councillor Mette Gundersen, Vice-Mayor (Labour)	23-01-2008
Councillor Dag Vige (Liberals)	23-01-2008
Councillor Jørgen Kristiansen (Christian Democrats)	24-01-2008

Chapter four

E-forums: Refreshing the Representative Relationship?

Joachim Åström
Anna Carola Freschi
Stig Montin

1. Introduction

Among the countries in the European Union, different measures have been taken with the aim of vitalizing representative democracy. Especially at the local government level, various trials and reforms have been developed and implemented, such as reformation of local institutions, and introducing new forms of citizen participation and new roles for local politicians (Denters and Rose eds. 2005). Within this frame of democracy-oriented reforms, electronic democracy (e-democracy) is increasingly seen as a promising concept. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are viewed as important tools for invigorating local representative democracy. In other words, electronic and representative democracy are perceived as a potentially happy couple (Rodotà 1997; Hague and Loader 1999).

The ideal of a deliberative public sphere is probably the most influential concept in the scholarly writing on e-democracy. The Internet emerges as a communication medium uniquely suited to providing arenas for public debates. The specific aim of this chapter is therefore to provide some knowledge about the problems and challenges that arise when online discussion forums are implemented in local governments in the UK, Sweden and Italy. In this context, online discussion forums (or e-forums) are online spaces arranged by a local government where individual citizens, politicians and civil servants can engage in some form of dialogue concerning a wide range of issues, usually defined by the participants along the way. Discussions on the forum can take place at different times (a-synchronously). Individuals post their thoughts and reflections, but they do not have to be online at the same time (cf. Pratchett et al 2009: 73).

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A reform initiative or tool meant to enhance citizen participation can be adopted very differently by different countries, and even when it is adopted in similar ways, the effects may vary. Choosing one particular initiative for enhancing local democracy and relating it to the various contexts in which it is applied could thus provide some interesting insights into the types of institutional and contextual factors that are influencing the implementation and effects of that initiative. Ideas and initiatives that might be considered modest in one country can be viewed as rather radical in another; differences that are often related to national and historical institutional factors. To take just one example, Internet voting in ordinary elections is accepted in the UK, whereas it is considered inappropriate in Sweden, and opinion is divided on the issue in Italy.

2. Points of departure and chapter outline

One of the key challenges of online forums is the demands they place on politicians to better listen and respond to the citizens they represent. If these forums are to improve representative democracy, it is important not only that local governments provide opportunities for more widespread political engagement and participation, but also that political leaders change their behaviour. The critical question in this chapter is thus: to what extent and with what effects do local political representatives participate in discussion forums on the Internet, and how do they relate to this type of e-democracy themselves?

The relation between private citizens and local political representatives and decision makers (especially local councillors) is fundamental in representative democracies. Ideally, this relation should be characterised by continuous contact and mutual trust. According to an ideal of Western democracies, there should be an "electoral chain of command" (Dearlove 1973) or a "local popular government model" (Montin 1993), which contains three links: (i) citizens present needs and demands in different forums (such as directly to local representatives or within a political party), (ii) the municipal council makes policy decisions, and (iii) executive leaders/officers/professionals implement the policies. The first link can be called the input side of the political system, the second link the throughput side, while the third link can be called the output side (cf. Scharpf 2000).

The input side consists of arrangements and processes that legitimately transform particular interests into general interests. Constituents thus express their pref-

erences and these are transformed into collectively binding decisions ("government by the people"). The output side of the system consists of institutional arrangements and processes concerning problem solving and implementation of collectively binding decisions ("government for the people"). The basic prerequisite for input legitimation is citizen integration and participation, whereas the most important prerequisites for output legitimation are efficiency and effectiveness.

It is no secret that the ideal model has been questioned on empirical grounds for many decades in all Western democracies, but it is still considered an ideal. Several reforms and initiatives aimed to improve democracy at the local level also aim to improve this model, especially concerning the relation between citizens and political decision makers. Empirical evidence from England as well as Sweden suggests that this model actually works backwards; needs and demands are channelled through officers (directly or through various non-governmental organisations) rather than through politicians and political parties.

Considering the widespread notion of a growing gap between local politicians and their constituency, or more generally between representative democratic institutions and citizens, it could be expected that politicians would use different channels to fill this gap. Politicians at different levels in different democratic systems seem, in principle, willing to initiate and facilitate e-democracy measures, such as online discussion forums (e.g. Astrom 2004; Coleman 2005; Mahrer & Krimmer 2005; Wright 2006). On the other hand, according to much of the e-democracy literature, politicians seem to be among the hardest to engage in online participation (Pratchett et al. 2009: 79).

Online discussion forums could be of particular interest to politicians for at least two reasons. One reason is that e-forums make it possible to have a direct communication with specific groups and citizens in general across a wide range of local political matters. E-forums are less demanding than face-to-face interaction or chat forums. Politicians need not to participate as decision-makers, but as participants in a process of creating meaning and knowledge. Referring to literature on "meta-governance", in which "participating in networks" is one of several meta-governing options, politicians can thus be involved in politically important discussion which they otherwise would not have been part of. A second reason could be that by participating in online discussion forums, politicians can facilitate public deliberation (citizen-to-citizen communication). In this case the process is not just initiated in order to inform decision-making processes, but to inform citizens. E-forums can thus be an instrument for education in democracy. In sum, this interac-

tivity can promote more informed decision-making and as a by-product it might lead to greater trust between representatives and represented.

In order to relate online discussion forums to their democratic contexts, some basic differences between the three countries need to be clarified. While Sweden and the UK are quite equally wired to the web and thus share the same technological opportunity structure, Italy is a step behind, although progress has been made in recent years (Sartori 2006; Istat 2005, 2006). What is more important is that the political and institutional contexts of Sweden, the UK and Italy differ greatly: local governments in Sweden have a higher constitutional status and a higher degree of local autonomy than is the case in the UK (Kersting & Vetter eds. 2003); local authorities in Italy were empowered at the regional level in the 1970s, but at the municipal level politics is historically well entrenched and increasingly strategic from the institutional reforms of the 1990ies. Control by political parties is more apparent in Swedish local governments than in their UK counterparts; in Italy, the institutional (1990) and electoral (1993) reforms of the local government and the last modification of the national electoral system contributed to weakening local parties and to strengthening the trend of personalisation of the political leadership. While the renewal of local democracy seems in general to be more top-down oriented in the UK than in Sweden (John 2001), in Italy the innovation of local governance appears more dependent on the initiatives of emerging political 'entrepreneurs' (Trigilia 2005; Catanzaro et al. 2002), who are supported by parties to some extent, but mainly by personal resources and networks. Additionally, the local policy-implementing organisation in the Swedish local government system is far more coherent than that in the UK, which is characterised by a rather complex and even fragmented structure of partnerships and non-governmental organisations. In Italy the implementation of local policies has to face an intense effort towards re-organisation of the local administration, linked to the need to modernize and to coping with a financial crisis: in this context the opening of new channels for citizen participation can be seen as both an important resource for innovation and as a threat to the status quo.

In the following sections we will first provide an overview of national policies concerning e-democracy in the UK, Sweden and Italy. This is important since there are reasons to believe that the deployment of ICTs in local government is, at least in part, shaped by the manner in which national policies set out priorities for their use, the character of policy instruments, national control and steering. Then we present our three case studies: Wolverhampton in the UK, Gothenburg in Sweden and Flor-

ence in Italy. Finally, we put forward a comparative analysis and a concluding discussion.

3. E-democracy policies

3.1 The UK

As a number of commentators have noted in relation to UK local government (see for example Horrocks and Webb 1994; Chadwick and May 2003), the initial emphasis was on improving the service delivery functions of local authorities rather than on enhancing their representative function, and much of the expenditure on new technology by local authorities has been aimed at this goal. More recently, the national government has put more effort into engaging local governments in citizen participation and e-democracy. With respect to the previous view of the relation between local authorities and citizens, this may be interpreted as a change from viewing citizens as consumers towards viewing citizens as both consumers and partners on the output side of the local political system. However, the 1998 White Paper stated that the government wishes to see consultation and participation embedded in the culture of councils (DETR 1998: 39), and this was emphasised even further in the Local e-Democracy National Project (2004-2005). In this project, e-democracy was unmistakably about exploring how new technologies can change the way in which councils engage and work with their citizens (Local eDemocracy National Project 2004) and the motivating force is just as clear: it is about reversing the negative trend of local representative democracy. Besides moving to a more participatory form of governance, a specific challenge is thus to shift perceptions of local government, so that it is seen not simply as a service provider (the output side) but rather as a democratic arena (the input side). Supporting such efforts, the Local e-Democracy National Project delivered a range of e-democracy applications and products for local governments to use. These tools and products included ePetitioning and eConsultation, online citizens' panels and issue forums, webcasting and community TV, blogging platforms and support for ward councillors' websites; one or more of these is now used by 200 councils. Since 2006 the work of the National Project has been taken forward by ICELE, which is a Centre of Excellence "provid-

ing a focal point for advising and supporting local authorities and communities, to enhance participation in all parts of the democratic process" (www.icele.org).

According to a mapping based on a website analysis in 2004 of all local authorities in England and Wales (N=408) online discussion forums were rather common at the time. It was found that on 32 percent of the websites and in 20 percent of the local authorities citizens could suggest a new topic for discussion at the e-forum (Pratchett 2005).

3.2 Sweden

In contrast to the UK, the issue of rebuilding the relationship between citizens and their governments with the help of ICTs entered the Swedish political agenda as an opportunity to support the input side of government with extensive citizen participation. The main reason for this was the coinciding of the Internet hype at the end of the 1990s and the extensive ongoing state-backed study concerning democracy for the new century. This study argued strongly in favour of a more participatory democracy and the development of new techniques and methods based on ICTs. Also, it disassociated itself from viewing citizens as consumers, or as members of a 'spectator democracy'. Nevertheless, the successive policies of the social democratic government were much less comprehensive and radical than those implemented in the UK. New opportunities soon became overshadowed by concerns about digital divides, privacy, security and priorities of safeguarding and protecting traditional channels of influence. At best, the signal sent from central government to local governments was double: initiatives to invigorate local democracy are encouraged, but they should not in any way challenge or undermine the position of parties or local representatives (Åström 2004).

This hesitant attitude must be seen in light of the relatively stable context of Swedish local democracy: it is about conservatism in terms of democratic institutions, and does not reflect a general distrust of technology. Swedish society is known as very Internet-friendly, and it is generally held that all services that can be delivered electronically should be delivered electronically, provided that doing so is technically feasible and economically defensible. Even so, when it comes to reforms on the input side of the political system, proponents of e-democracy confront a dominant and long-standing democratic paradigm that strongly emphasizes the role of the parties as formulators of policy and channels of influence. Compared to Eng-

land and Italy, Sweden stands out as a rather extreme case in this regard. In fact, the Swedish representative comes out on top when it comes to party loyalty in Europe as a whole (Bäck 2006). In this historical context, of course, any move to open up local political processes challenges the dominance of the party as the body in which councillors make decisions and come to represent the electorate. At the same time, the use of strong policy instruments is not in accordance with the Swedish tradition. Therefore developments towards e-democracy are very much based on local initiatives. A working group has been formed within the Governmental Office in order to support research and development in this area, but the government has not yet specified the goals, prepared recommendations for actions nor made any significant move to initiate trials.

Even though e-democracy is not part of a national reform program, many local politicians have demonstrated optimism and positive attitudes toward it. But local governments vary considerably in the extent to which they offer information and possibilities for interactive communication on their websites. Most local governments use the Internet for modernisation rather than radical regeneration, even though the use of interactive features has increased, slowly but steadily, in the last couple of years. For example, in 2001, 14 percent of the municipalities had Internet discussion forums; in 2003, the proportion had increased to nearly 30 percent. At this time about three quarters of all 289 municipalities had at least some interactive function, such as an opportunity for citizens to send e-mail to the chairmen of the Executive Committee (Åström 2004).

3.3 Italy

In Italy, the use of ICT to improve the dialogue between citizens and local governments was first adopted in the mid-1990s, during a very peculiar phase of Italian politics. A tremendous scandal over the corruption of the leading national political parties brought on the collapse of the old party systems, and the emergence of new parties (Lega and Forza Italia). These circumstances, combined with the new role acquired by local governments within the architecture of the European policies, led to a renewed role for cities and regions on the political scene. In a first phase, political parties faced the pressures of hostile public opinion and preferred to stay in the shadow of strong personalities emerging from civil society.

In this first phase, the idea of 'digital cities' was seen as an innovative and fascinating way to connect citizens to local governments, replacing the discredited political parties. One of the most famous and advanced experiences born at this stage of local e-democracy in Italy is the well-known Iperbole, promoted by the Municipality of Bologna.

Subsequently, different factors pushed for slowing down the development of the political dimension of civic networks. A public finance crisis, which moved from central to local institutions in conjunction with a growth of local competences, prompted local governments to look into ways to use ICTs to modernize the administrative organisations and cut expenses. But two main elements reshaped the attitudes towards e-democracy and e-participation once again: (i) the flourishing of social movements and local initiatives of self-organised citizens, and (ii) the growing difficulties of political parties in their function of intermediating political demands in the face of the strong economic impact of globalisation on national productivity and, by extension, on local economies. These two elements became an incentive to try more inclusive forms of local governance, especially where the media context appeared unfavourable to the coalition of the local government. In such cases, local governments were inclined to appreciate the opportunities to establish a direct channel to citizens and experiment with new forms of participative democracy. In general, ICTs also came to be increasingly valued because of their greater diffusion in society, a decade after the first civic networks were established.

Within this political context a national innovative policy to promote local e-democracy was defined in 2003 by the initiative of the Ministry of Technological Innovation, Lucio Stanca, former top manager in one of the most important ICT industries in the world. The three main instruments of that policy were: (i) research on the state of e-participation in local government in Italy, which included website analysis and focus groups and involved not only those responsible for municipal digital networks, but also the administrators and those responsible for trialling local-level participative initiatives (e.g. strategic urban planning, Agenda 21, participatory budgeting etc.); (ii) the provision of a booklet of Guidelines to promote local digital citizenship; (iii) a national call to co-fund local e-democracy projects to the amount of 10 million Euros.

The Guidelines (2004) have some interesting features. For instance, the deliberative dimension is emphasised, going beyond the usual reduction of participation processes to the gathering of preformed preferences. The idea of integrating the new e-tools into more traditional methods of participation is also strongly asserted, re-

jecting the 'substitutive approach', which has not had good results in the past. Thus, offline and online participation have to be coordinated and mutually linked, and the mix of different skills in the participative design is emphasised. A further recommendation of the Guidelines, inspired by some Nordic experiences (Swedish Association of Local Authorities et al. 2001), is to connect participation to concrete decision making along all the phases of the policy life cycle (from agenda to evaluation).

The national call received an exceptional number of applications (132 local projects, involving 600 municipalities and 43 civil society associations). Only 56 projects (for a total investment of 73 million Euros) met the selection criteria and started at the beginning of 2006. They address issues related to urban strategic planning, Agenda 21, participatory budgeting, social and environmental planning and other emerging innovative forms of local governance. It is still too early to evaluate the results of this ongoing experience. Nevertheless, some data (CENSIS-RUR 2006) on the provision of e-democracy services by the Italian local authorities show that there is much to do in order to achieve better information, consultation and dialogue with citizens. Only one third of the municipalities publish their budgets online; between 2004 and 2006 there was a decrease (from 17% to 8%) in the number of online forums offered by the municipalities' head of province. At the same time, there was a strong increase in newsletters and online forms to gather citizens' comments and questions. In conclusion, the Italian frame is quite uneven: besides some quite innovative attempts to approach an ambitious model of discursive e-democracy, the great majority of experiences have given little space to the development of a true dialogue between citizens and their representatives at the local level, as well at the national level.

4. The case studies

In this section we will analyse and compare developments in Gothenburg, Sweden, Wolverhampton, the UK, and Florence, Italy, focusing especially on their use of Internet discussion forums. These forums have been established in order to increase citizen participation by letting people have their say on various matters, such as those relating to planning and local public service. Digital dialogues are not frequently used, but because of their potential for widening the communication space in the public sphere they can be regarded as an increasingly important challenge to other types of communication channels between electors and the electorate (cf. Hoff

et al. 2000). Information about the three cases is based on personal interviews conducted in Gothenburg (2005), Wolverhampton (2003), and Florence (2001-2006). Additionally, content analyses were made of documents and website information. In order to follow-up the results from the interviews, internal and external evaluations have been taken into consideration.

4.1 From Wolforum to Partnership: e-participation in Wolverhampton

The e-participation project in Wolverhampton started as a rather modest output-oriented model, but has since developed into a model emphasising the input side and the participation of council members. The city council launched its website in 1997. It started out by supplying basic information about local services, and there was initially no formal plan for citizen consultation. In 2000, the council was invited by Wolverhampton University to join an ICT project as a partner. This was considered as an opportunity to develop ICT-based citizen contact and engage the public. This was done in a context in which different national policies were made, such as Best Value, which changed local representatives' attitudes towards the requirements of public consultation. Another national government requirement, which is important in this respect, is the idea of "Local Strategic Partnerships". In Wolverhampton a partnership was organised containing different public agencies and organisations within the voluntary sector. There are 16 other local organisations within the partnership, which is called "Citywide Involvement Network Partners". The intention is that all public consultation be coordinated by this local partnership.

Wolforum was launched in 2001 as a website based in Wolverhampton. It was formally a research project, during the period 2001-2003, concerning software applications and development. The Wolforum and Wolverhampton City Council websites were separated for two main reasons. Technically they were different and not compatible, but the other main reason was that Wolforum was organised as a partnership in which the council was just one of the partners. The overall project was called Webocracy, financed by the EU (the Fifth Framework programme). Webocracy – a short form for Web Technologies Supporting Direct Participation in Democratic Processes – was mainly focused on technological solutions aiming at finding "…efficient systems providing effective and secure user-friendly tools, working methods, and support mechanisms to ensure the efficient exchange of information between citizens and public administration institutions" (Webocracy

2002: 1). The project had three types of objectives: project objectives, organisational objectives, and scientific objectives. The first, and the most relevant in this context, was to contribute to "empowering citizens with innovative communication, access and a polling system supporting increased participation of citizens in democratic processes and increased transparency and accessibility of public administration (PA)" (Webocracy 2002: 9).

Wolverhampton was one of the user partners in the Webocracy consortium, which means that they were responsible for the realisation of pilot applications, tests and evaluations of such applications. The discussion forum was one such pilot application (along with routing of messages, access to information about the council, and online opinion polls), and it was developed with technical assistance from the University of Wolverhampton. The discussion forum, as well as other modules (such as opinion polls) within the Webocracy project, was an instrument for enhancing citizens' access to information and giving them further opportunities to have their say in the development of community strategies. Web-based citizen consultations also became a part of the development of community strategies for improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of the citizens in Wolverhampton.

The relationship between Wolforum and the ordinary political process can best be described as loosely coupled. To start with, Wolforum was not initiated by the local council but by academics with a particular interest in software development. The council administrators utilising the website were primarily concerned about using it to increase public consultation and participation. The discussion forum played an important role in these efforts, but the first years of the project were used to learn how to develop appropriate software solutions. According to the project managers, it became more important to deepen the cooperation with the local partners. Another factor underlining the loose connection was that very few local council representatives had been involved in the online debates. When issues concerning local council matters were raised in the discussion forum, or in other forms of citizen involvement, feedback was given to the council, but the councillors are not particularly engaged in these matters. We were told that interest in ICT in general is not very high among the councillors, and that those who have been in office for several years often feel that they know about public needs and therefore do not find any further consultation necessary.

Another explanation for the loose connection to the political system is traditional views of, and institutionalised practices regarding, what a local government is and what it should do. According to the interviewed officers in Wolverhampton,

1980s legislation does not allow any material conveying party political views to be put on the website, and council tax money cannot be used for party propaganda. It is not entirely clear what this legislation means in practice. It is fairly clear that there can be no propaganda on the website, such as material that says what a good job the party in power is doing, but there has also been a debate in the UK over individual councillors' websites. Many local government solicitors are concerned that providing councillors with websites, managed by councils, could breach this legislation. Some councils (e.g. Leicester City Council) had provided all of its councillors with websites thereby sidestepping the problem of political bias. However, in Wolverhampton (as in, for example, Southwark) some expressed the belief that it might be illegal, or at least unsuitable, to post party political views on the discussion forum. In order to avoid polarising political parties, the Wolforum website was launched after the 2001 local election and – probably also due to the low interest among the representatives – the discussion forum has not been used politically in this sense since then. In a short evaluation of the experiences of the project some years later the project manager Peter Thomson writes:

> *Use by councillors was minimal, although in principle it could be used for councillors to discuss issues with their local community. Since the end of the project, some local councillors have expressed interest in using this sort of tool* (Thompson 2006).

However, one "lesson learnt" from the project is that "online discussions can generate worthwhile contributions that can provide a valuable additional input for council decision making" (Thompson 2006).

The Wolforum project formally concluded at the end of 2003 and subsequently a new website was launched. The new website is similar to that used during the project, in that its purpose is to allow citizens to participate in opinion polls and debates concerning local issues, and to provide easy access to information about local services through the Internet. Visitors to the website were encouraged to give their opinions about the Wolforum, but people in Wolverhampton do not seem to be fully aware of the ICT-based possibilities yet. During a three-month period at the beginning of 2004, only 19 persons had given their opinions, and by the end of 2004 there were 18 discussion forums, containing 3 to 11 topics and between 6 and 35 messages (Wolforum 2004).

About two years after the end of the Wolforum project a new national government-financed project started: "Wolverhampton's partnership e-participation" (along with Bristol, St. Albans and the Black Country). The idea was to set up a consultation website and recruit an e-panel of citizens to take part in consultations (Turner 2006). In August 2006 about 360 panel members were recruited, and 96 members had taken part in five online discussions. The discussions were moderated by council staff. According to an August 2006 report, council officers were "overwhelmingly enthusiastic" about the project, but it seems that generally the councillors were not very involved. The author of the report writes that "it would have been useful to get partners and councillors more fully involved in the project". However, there are quite high expectations of councillors' involvement in a number of ways, such as contributing to online discussions, using the information gathered from online consultations to inform policy decisions, and using the tools on the site to find out the views of residents in their wards (Turner 2006).

Although political representatives in general do not seem to participate or be otherwise involved in the interactive tools of e-democracy referred to above, the expectations of such involvement remain quite high (cf. Hayward 2005).

4.2 The Municipal Digital Network of Florence

The Municipal Digital Network (MDN) in Florence was founded in 1996 by the new mayor, who came from academia and interpreted his mandate as a technical one. Three online forums were established in 1997 (Associations, Civic Networks and Citizens), but debate did not take off and a year later the forums were closed. In the two-year period, fewer than 80 messages were sent by about 40 people. The three forums showed an overall lack of participation of the political representatives. Looking at the Florentine MDN, the website section dedicated to the council appears scarcely developed. Citizens can contact assessors and the mayor through private e-mail channels or through the section "Comunicare con l'Amministrazione", where citizens' can pose questions and seek public answers. Actually, this public space was not truly interactive as many questions remained unanswered months after they were posed. Moreover, analysing the content of questions and answers, and some specific answers of assessors or the vice-mayor, it emerges that politicians do not consider this as a space for a political debate. They interpret it as a means to provide citizens with information about the administration's activities and to explain its

malfunctions. Nevertheless, citizens posting comments or questions to the service seem to require a broader and more open dialogue, especially with regard to the hottest issues related to public spaces and transport infrastructure. Local government actors have explicitly refused to engage in this level of debate. Asked for an explanation, political leaders appeal to the principle of representative democracy: their mandate is defined by the electoral program (of the mayor and its electoral coalition); any gap can be defined only within a political party's dialectic. The relationships with individual citizens or their self-organized groups have been maintained by politicians within the boundaries of administrative efficiency, although citizens express different needs.

This orientation has been significantly modified since the beginning of 2000. The political frame has changed: the new mayor is an eminent, although relatively young, personality on the national scene, with a significant background in the main political left party and a prominent role in the national association of the municipalities. Two of its first main initiatives, were hosting the European Social Forum 2002 and the launch of a more inclusive decision-making process with regard to defining the strategic plan for the development of the city (strategic urban planning), supported by a prestigious scientific committee. These initiatives were accompanied by two online services. A conference on globalisation involved the mayor and students from four schools who were linked by streaming video so that after registration they were able to send online messages. This experiment was quite interesting in terms of external access by e-mail, but it also gathered much criticism concerning the selection of the public (which was made by the administration), because it excluded a great number of local associations and groups from direct interaction with the mayor (Freschi 2002). In contrast, the subsequent discussion forum opened on a specific website dedicated to the decision-making process on urban strategic planning (Piano strategico), completely failed to involve associations and citizens in the online debate: very few of the city's many voices with an interest in crucial policy participated online. The most influential social, economic and political actors remained silent, apparently preferring to use more conventional and opaque channels of direct negotiation with the administration. Based on the interviews, it was concluded that the absence of these actors strongly reduced the credibility of the government initiative to open up to online debate with local society. The distance between online and offline spheres reduces the likelihood that weakly organised actors and individual citizens will have sufficient motivation to participate in the discussion forum.

In a third, more recent phase coinciding with the disputed reconfirmation of the mayor in 2004 and with a wider institutional attention to the participation needs at national as well local levels, the Florentine municipality launched a set of participative processes focused on different issues related to urban policies and frequently tailored at sub-municipal levels (Freschi 2007). This phase includes – in a more integrated way than in past initiatives – the development of a website (Firenze insieme) managed by a new department of the local government created specifically for the purpose (Assessorato on participation and new lifestyles). Unfortunately, the new online discussion forums have received only scant attention from citizens (fewer than 10 people have posted items on the site) as well as from members of the administration, who continue to refuse to intervene directly online. Once citizens become aware of the administration's attitude, they promptly abandon the forum. Some technical and organisational elements had also made these forums difficult to use, such as the very short length of the messages accepted, the lack of a space to deliver documents produced by associations, the delay in the online publication of institutional and citizens' documents. Faced with an administration that appears anxious to control the information flows coming from civil society, self-organised citizens react by creating their own websites, publishing institutional documentation and their own enquiries, and intensifying the use of mailing lists to discuss issues of concern. Although this reaction can be seen as positive in some respects, there is a risk of fragmentation among groups within the local public sphere.

A lack of interaction between politicians and citizens seems to be the main trait of the Florentine MDN. A partially different experience has been that of the forum on bicycle paths (in 2004), which involved 50 male and 30 female citizens in a very rich discussion that, in the end, was reflected (albeit in a limited way) in the new municipal plan. Unfortunately, again in this case, the assessor in charge did not post any comments or responses nor discursively interact with the citizens. The very idea of the forum is not so much as a dialogue with citizens but rather as a means of gathering information and suggestions. It is an answer to the need to replace the channelling functions of the political parties.

In sum, considering the specificity of the party system it is evident that the social transformation has shaken the representative politics at base level, without compromising the usual mechanism of leadership selection. At this stage, citizen participation, in general and with regard to the frontiers of e-participation in particular, is seen by politicians (elected or appointed) mainly as an instrument to channel political demands, preserving their power to set the agenda and select the issues to be

addressed; it is not seen as an instrument to encourage debate nor even to build new policies with the citizens and their new forms of organisation. A look at the councillors' websites seems to confirm this weak interest in online public debate. The unique exception comes from the website of a new left small aggregation (UnaltracittàUnaltromondo) led by a female councillor who competed with the mayor and was reconfirmed in the last election, in 2004. The more intensive use of ICT tools, particularly mailing lists and website information services, can be explained by the challenging condition and the light organisational structure (a network of small, varied, informal collective subjects with undefined boundaries) of the group supporting the new councillor (Freschi 2007).

4.3 The Gothenburg Case

Gothenburg, in Sweden, does not have a regular online forum like Florence or Wolverhampton. However, in late 2004 the city launched an online forum in relation to a large redevelopment project as part of an innovative effort to break with traditional structures for policy-making and planning (Granberg & Åström 2010). The renewal of Södra Älvstranden was characterized by two challenging traits. Firstly, responsibilities for the project were to a considerable extent outsourced to a company. Ävstranden Utvecklings AB (ÄUAB) was owned by the municipality, and its board consisted of key politicians in Gothenburg and "heavyweight" representatives of commercial interests in the city. This company was given the responsibility of managing the redevelopment of Södra Älvstranden and bringing together investors willing to capitalise the project and buy real estate in the area. The basic financing concept was this: a part of the area was planned, developed and then sold to private stakeholders. The economic resources that were generated from that process were then used to plan and redevelop the next section of the area. In this way, the redevelopment project would have a minimal financial impact on the tax payers.

Secondly, the project aimed at broadening and deepening citizens´ participation. Since the municipality was critical about how urban planning was handled by its planning department, the mission of enhancing citizen participation was also "contracted out" to the ÄUAB. The subsequent dialogue with citizens consisted of two main components: a forum on the Internet and an exhibition at the City museum. The activity on the online forum was quite limited in the early phases, but increased as the process went on: by November 2006, 980 posts had been registered

on the forum. The contributions focused on city life, housing, transport, the environment, and the participation process. In addition, the forum had features such as "question and opinion of the week" and "advice to the editors". Many contributions were direct proposals and opinions about how the new city space ought to be used. The discussion in the forum was vibrant, and included heated debates on a multitude of issues.

The way communications evolved between different actors was the most interesting aspect of the Gothenburg participatory experience. On the one hand, the ambitions were high when it came to creating new arenas for open communication; the activities at the city museum and the Internet debate indicate this. On the other hand, the experiment was characterised by an absence of formal decision-makers. A decision to keep the politicians out of the debate was deliberatively made by the leadership of the political parties, seemingly influenced by contemporary public management philosophies in which party politics is considered irrational, contributing to locked-in positions, and hindering effective problem-solving. Another interpretation would be that politicians, by distancing themselves from the participation process, reserved a right to take an independent decision in the end. In any case, the informal citizen participation process became disconnected from the formal decision-making arenas, and potentially worthwhile interactions between these arenas were lost. The decision-makers were unable to communicate important considerations for enabling the formulation of "realistic proposals" and the citizens could not relate to the decision-makers' preferences and priorities. Instead, the "dialogue" was limited to a communication that can be compared with that of a child (the citizen) asking for sweets and the responsible parent (the decision-maker) referring to limited resources and difficulties implementing the request instead of actually engaging in a discussion (cf. Newman et al. 2004).

In the end, the impact of citizen participation on the actual decisions was limited and it became clear that citizens and decision-makers had different perceptions about what "game" was being "played". Citizens taking part in the online debate and those interviewed for the evaluation report expressed expectations about an open process where participating citizens are able to influence the process. Such expectations were not unfounded—there are several examples of the term "influence" being used in information materials and advertisements that urge citizens to participate in the process. Representatives from ÄUAB and the planning department, however, presented another picture. They stated that the dialogue was characterised by extended public deliberations that constituted "foreplay" or an "additional element"

that preceded the formal planning process and the implementation. Consequently, the participation process was more about a diffuse contribution to planning rather than a more direct influence over the future development of Södra Älvstranden. From this perspective, citizen participation was more about sharing problems than about sharing power (Åström & Granberg 2007).

5. Comparative analysis and conclusions

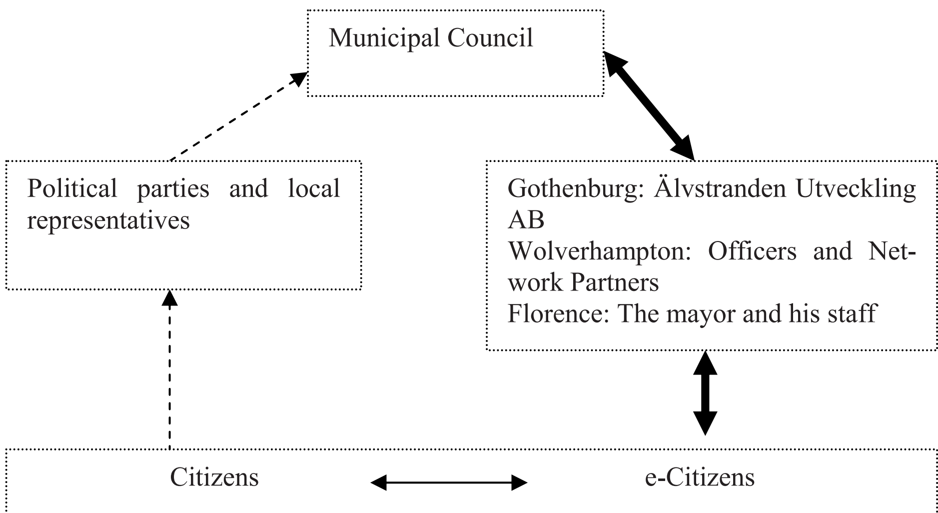
According to the proponents of electronic democracy, the decline of confidence in representative institutions is the result of a failure to forge meaningful connections between politicians and citizens. As people have become less deferential, as society has become more diverse, and as new means of two-way communication have developed, citizens have come to demand a less distant, more direct, conversational form of representation. People want their representatives to listen more closely to them, and then to show that they have listened. A more sophisticated and ambitious use of ICT is seen as a way of modernising and refreshing the representative relationship (Coleman 2005). The empirical findings in this study, however, suggest that digital discussion forums have failed to facilitate the sort of conversational relationship e-democracy proponents are advocating: they have not made any meaningful improvements to the relationship between elected politicians and citizens. Either politicians are not interested or they are not allowed to take part. As a result, the processes in the new forums and the traditional arenas of representative democracy are not connected. From the point of view of citizens, inviting them to engage in dialogue on local issues and then ignoring them may even lead to a further loss of trust in representative institutions.

Instead, the analysis shows that it is in the output of the political system that citizen-local government interactions take place – when they do take place. In this respect the three cases are similar, but there are also significant differences between them. Due to fundamental institutional differences, the output side of the local political system is quite differently organised. The two websites in Wolverhampton were based on partnerships in which Wolverhampton council was just one among several partners. In Gothenburg, the municipal professional organisation is usually more close-knit than that in Wolverhampton. In this project, however, management was to a considerable extent outsourced to a company, Älvstranden Utveckling AB. In the case of the municipal digital network of Florence, the website is managed

directly by a structure controlled by the local government. The municipality represents one of the most complex and conspicuous organisations in Tuscany: following a mainstreaming trend, in the last decade it has downsized by means of outsourcing and increasing cooperation with enterprises and the third sector. Nevertheless, citizen involvement in the reshaping of the public sector is still in its early stages, and therefore e-democracy experimentation is far from being fully implemented in this relevant field.

Despite these important differences, it is officers, professionals, and perhaps some individual political leaders that strengthen their role with the help of digital dialogues, rather than local elected political representatives in general and the political parties in particular. In Gothenburg this means Älvstranden Utveckling AB; in Wolverhampton it means council officers, public agencies and voluntary organisations in partnerships; and in Florence, this means the mayor and his staff. In all three cases the impact of e-democracy on the internal balance of power has been to reinforce the tendencies to shift influence away from the input to the output side of the system (figure 1).

Figure 4.1. Actual chain of steering



While previous research has demonstrated that the implementation of e-forums is undertaken at a slower pace than many would expect, the results of this study show that they also receive very little political support in actual use. Similar tendencies are found in other countries as well, such as the Netherlands (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000) and Norway (Sandkjaer Hanssen 2007): when initiatives to engage citizens are undertaken, councillors and political parties often become marginalised in the process. E-forums, it seems, are not very easily related to the traditional view of representative democracy, but lie closer to a discourse in which citizens are defined as co-responsible and co-producers with regard to the professional system of local government. This leads us to a range of new questions, both normative and empirical: What mechanisms can connect e-participation with real policy-making? Under what conditions are political representatives willing to engage in online debates with citizens? If the output side of the system immerses itself in these environments, what does this mean for the legitimacy of the decision-making process?

Chapter five

A New Position for Civil Society and Citizens?

Bríd Quinn[34]

1. Introduction

Increased interdependencies and changed economic and political strategies have altered the role and resources of government while the spread of neo-liberalism and pluralism has affected perceptions of the legitimate role of government and increased the dependence of government on other actors. These transformations have led to ongoing reform of institutions, structures and processes in an effort to respond effectively to the challenges of change. Acknowledgement of defects in current democratic systems has caused governments everywhere to focus on the puzzles identified in Chapter 1. A common approach to resolving these puzzles at local level is to institutionalise linkages between politicians, public servants, communities and citizens, thereby reducing the tensions between representative, associative and participatory forms of democracy. Consequently, many countries have introduced schemes for re-engaging citizens and civil society as a means of 'democratic renewal'. This chapter explores the theoretical and empirical manifestations of such strategems.

Democratic renewal is both the end and the means of many reform efforts and the notion of democratic renewal has been conceptualised in many ways. Pratchett (2000) describes three ways in which democratic renewal is used – as a practical response to particular problems, as a means of redressing the perceived systemic failures of local government and as a normative description of a new mode of democracy which combines representative and participative dimensions. Giddens reiterates the perceived integrative benefits of democratic renewal and argues that

34 The author would like to acknowledge financial support from the University of Limerick SEED Foundation which enabled this research to be carried out. Thanks also to the interviewees for their illuminating insights.

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'government can re-establish more direct contact with citizens and citizens with government through 'experiments with democracy' ....these won't substitute for the normal voting mechanism in local and central government, but could be an enduring complement to them' (1998: 3). Fischer (2009), too, stresses the significance of deliberative practices for revitalising democracy. Democratic renewal is perceived as a means of facilitating citizen involvement in the 'input' and 'throughput' dimensions of legitimacy (Scharpf 1999) and including them formally in public policy-making. The OECD handbook *Citizens as Partners* (2001) identifies participation as a way of building trust and support for local governance and suggests various strategies for involving citizens. The structures and processes which facilitate greater involvement of citizens and associations are also perceived to cultivate social connections and solidarity (Fung 2006; Sintomer and de Maillard 2007), thereby improving the functioning of local democracy and addressing problems of legitimacy, justice and efficiency in contemporary democracy. Institutionalisation of collaborative forms of policy deliberation and delivery has challenged the dichotomous state-society depiction that underpinned liberal democratic theory and has fostered recognition of the need for different spaces and structures for state-society interaction. Thus, the theoretical justifications for renewing local democracy include reassessment of paradigms, recalibration of the state-society relationship and reinvigoration of participative processes.

In practice, democratic renewal affects both institutions and actors and poses normative and practical challenges. The role of the citizen in the contemporary political arena is amorphous while the role of civil society is ambiguous. Thus, questions arise about the position of citizens, the function and motivation of civil society organisations, the expectations of politicians and administrators and the methods of institutionalising involvement. Most attempts at democratic renewal focus on involving citizens in the process of governing, whether as individuals or as members of collectivities. Some attempts at involvement have sprung from the desire of locals to be involved but many have been initiated by the organs of the state. The 'top-down' approach to citizen\civil-society involvement raises questions about the process of identification of actors and the risk of a 'manufactured' civil society. Equally, the community imperative brings problems of representativeness, capacity and accountability. These contrasting statist versus communitarian approaches affect both the configuration and consequences of the involvement strategies.

While the ideological imperatives for democratic renewal are clear, the objectives, outputs and outcomes of attempts to expand the role of citizens and civil soci-

ety are more opaque. What problems are expected to be solved by the expanded focus on civil society? Does the focus on civil society affect the roles and relative positions of citizens, politicians and public servants? Has systemic change emerged in the form of new structures and decision-making processes? How successful are the reforms? Are the changes likely to endure and can they be replicated? The chapter explores these questions using both theoretical and empirical sources. The chapter continues with a conceptual discussion on citizens, civil society and democracy which is followed by three case studies from Limerick, Copenhagen and Grenoble. In the concluding section, the reality of democratic renewal in the three cities is linked to the theoretical debates outlined in the introductory sections. Using cases from different systems and reflective of different settings and cultures, the chapter captures the essence of attempts to use civil society as a means of enhancing and sustaining democracy. The cases reflect both the diversity of approaches and the commonality of problems.

2. Citizens, Civil Society and Local Democracy

Changing social mores, personal modernisation, widespread affluence, increased levels of education and the influence of mass communication have affected citizens' perceptions of governance structures and processes and their own role within those processes and structures. Consequently, the concept of citizenship remains contested. Lister (2003) underscores the dualism between citizenship as a status and as a practice while Fischer calls for a 'multi-layered understanding of citizenship' (2009: 63). The roles ascribed to citizens reflect the changing discourse of politics which has modishly categorised them as customers, clients, consumers and co-producers. The changing roles and demands of citizens are accompanied by a widespread desire among governments to consult citizens with regard to structures, processes and policies. Many governments have put in place systems to involve citizens in decision-making – these range from local referenda, citizen juries, user-boards and youth councils to multistage dialogue, partnerships and 'future' workshops (Loughlin 2001; Council of Europe 2004; Giddens 1998; Quinn 2007). However, there remains an uncertainty among citizens about the part they want to play in governance and an inconsistency in government attitudes to the citizenry.

Central to many attempts at democratic renewal is the involvement of civil society. Within the academic debate on the nature and role of civil society it is possi-

ble to identify recurring themes such as associative freedom, the accommodation of pluralism and diversity and the significance of actions outside the public/state sphere in sustaining the potential for democratic practices (Edwards 2004; Keane 1998). Throughout the world civil society, in its various aspects, serves to bring a wide variety of voices to the democratic processes and is used to foster new relationships between citizens and government in both formal and informal contexts. The discourse on democratic renewal attaches great significance to civil society's aggregative function. Associative groups are perceived to enhance the quality of governance by fostering deliberation and discussion, evolving a shared language, generating alternative policy possibilities and promoting social solidarity. They also serve as a basis for collective action and as a conduit for the views of individual citizens since, nowadays, people are more likely to engage in social and political action or reaction via intermediary organisations rather than via traditional partisan politics (Stoker 2006). The reasons for involving civil society are not only normative but are frequently instrumental, serving to harness the expertise, local knowledge, particular competencies and the range of linkages which civil society involvement brings to the encounter. The variety of civil society groupings is enormous and does not fit neatly with geographical, historical or ideological classifications. Some groups are carefully constituted with formally-stated rules and clear purposes while others, though clear of purpose, are less formal.

3. Case-selection and data collection

While many studies have focused on the role played by civil society (Fung 2006; Fischer 2009) there has been a 'failure to acknowledge the central importance of the role played by the state in facilitating and promoting alternative forms of 'associational' and 'deliberative' democracy' (Adshead, Kirby and Millar 2008: 21). The case studies selected for this chapter have a deliberate focus on the engineering and facilitating role of the state in involving civil society in formal discursive and procedural arrangements. Cases were selected which focus on structured rather than episodic involvement of citizens and civil society and are therefore, more likely to endure. State sponsorship of the initiative and a desire for 'institutional embodiment' (Blaug 2002) were criteria for case selection. The diversity of roles played by civil society and the plethora of disparate strategies to involve citizens complicate comparison (Wolman 2008) but these criteria ensure comparability and similarity of

focus. The statist initiatives emanated from the centre but for different purposes and with different results. The institutional paths of Ireland, Denmark and France developed in contrasting ways. Citizen/civil society involvement in local government is historically embedded in the Scandinavian system whereas, despite a long history of community activism, formal involvement is a newer phenomenon in the Irish system while France is undergoing transformation from 'symmetric uniformity to asymmetric diversity'. The Danish case illustrates involvement of civil society for a specific purpose linked to a tangible project, Kvarterløft in Copenhagen. The Irish case focuses on Limerick City Development Board (LCDB), an example of the state-designed system for formally involving civil society in the reformed structures of local governance. Similarly, the French example, Grenoble, showcases a situation wherein formal mechanisms for citizen/civil society involvement have been added to the local governance structures. Because the focus of democratic renewal in all three cases is on greater formal involvement of citizens and civil society there is clear capacity for comparison in relation to particular variables such as conceptual basis, purpose, outcomes, sustainability and potential for replication.

Research for the case-studies was qualitative and involved a review of primary and secondary literature as well as a series of semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were selected on a number of grounds: professional expertise; involvement in one of the democratic renewal strategies under analysis; academic reputation; standing in the community or recommendation by other interviewees. For each country, the researcher sought a range of perspectives so that a nuanced understanding would be obtained and both the positive and negative impacts of the renewal mechanisms would be uncovered. For the Limerick case-study formal interviews were carried out with four civil society representatives, three local politicians including a mayor who had served on LCDB, two senior officials in local government and one senior civil servant in central government. Informal conversations were held with a range of commentators including academics, local development professionals and citizens to ascertain awareness of and attitudes to County Development Boards (CDBs). Due to language restrictions, the interviews in Copenhagen were restricted to a senior administrator in local government, two academic observers and three Kvarterløft personnel (a local government administrator, a programme manager who had previously served as a city councillor and a project worker who had originally been a grassroots activist). In Grenoble interviews were carried out in French and English with three civil society representatives, the deputy mayor and two administrators from the municipality and the metropolitan body. The researcher also attended a

meeting of one Conseil Consultatif de Secteur (CCS), a meeting of a Comité de Liaison des Unions de Quartiers (CLUQ) and a meeting at which candidates from the local electoral list addressed community issues.

The insights gleaned from the interviewees helped to give a comprehensive portrayal of the participation initiatives as well as enhancing the researcher's contextual understanding. The remainder of the chapter outlines the specifics of the democratic renewal endeavours in each of the three cities and extrapolates the common traits and dilemmas.

4. Limerick City Development Board: institutionalising participation and strengthening democracy?

In order to understand the context in which current efforts at democratic renewal emerged, it is useful to review some key features of the Irish system. Ireland has a strongly centralised political system with functions such as health, education and policing being carried out by central government departments (Quinn 2003). Following seventy years of stasis, the 1990s were a decade of unparalleled change for local government with the 1996 document *Better Local Government, A Strategy for Change* underpinning a series of reforms[35] which continue to affect the workings of Irish local government. A further plan for reform The Green Paper *Stronger Local Democracy – Options for Change* published in 2008 also focuses on facilitating greater connection with citizens.

Although rarely referred to in that term, civil society in Ireland has long been active and is usually referred to as the Community and Voluntary sector. Community and voluntary organisations seek to redress perceived gaps in government policy and provision as well as articulating the concerns and perspectives of the marginalised, thereby fulfilling the dual roles which the theorists cited earlier ascribed to civil society. Until the late 1990s they operated outside the formal local government system so as part of its reform strategy, central government sought to integrate local

35 The range of reforms was influenced by other key documents such as the Report of the Expert Advisory Committee on Local Government Reorganisation and Reform (Barrington 1991), the Devolution Commission Reports (Government of Ireland, 1996 and 1997), the KPMG Report on the financing of Local Government in Ireland (1996), Towards Cohesive Local Government – Town and Country (Reorganisation Commission, 1996), the Report of the Constitution Review Group (1996) and Modernising Government: The Challenge for Local Government (DoELG, 2000).

government and local development. To achieve these aims, new structures were created, based on a partnership approach. A foundation stone of the reform was the creation of the County Development Boards (CDBs) which are charged with the social, cultural and economic development of their particular local authority area. Guidelines as to the composition, structure and processes of the Boards were issued by a central government Task Force which also enunciated the principles such as participation, transparency and consensual decision-making which were to underpin their working.

The CDBs bring together representatives from local government, local development, the social partners and state agencies. The Boards are designed to provide a governance framework and co-ordinate activity at the local level. They are chaired by elected councillors. Community and Voluntary fora were created in each local authority area to facilitate local communities in having an input into the CDB processes. All these developments were enshrined in the Local Government Act 2001, thus ensuring a statutory base for the CDBs. The Development Boards have overseen the agreement of a vision and a 12-year social, economic and cultural strategy for their county/city. The importance of CDBs in the Irish political landscape was underscored by references to them in the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* and the *National Development Plan* 2007-2013. The remainder of this case-study is concerned with how Limerick City CDB exemplifies the aspiration to renew local democracy.

Limerick is Ireland's third largest city and has a population of 52,539 within the urban boundary (CSO 2006) but when the suburban population is included the city encompasses more than 80,000 people. The city includes the whole spectrum of socio-economic indicators containing some affluent areas and some areas with serious, persistent socio-economic problems. The Limerick City Development Board (LCDB) is comprised of 28 people representing Local Government (7), State Agencies (10), Local Development (6), Social Partners (5). Of the local development representation, two are community representatives and two are professionals in the sector. Among the social partner group, three are from the voluntary and community sector. Thus, various dimensions of civil society are represented on the Board. The original strategy prepared by LCDB emerged from a wide consultation process involving contact with almost 600 organisations. Following revision of the strategy in line with national guidelines, LCDB is now engaged in realising sixteen goals, each of which has clear objectives, measurable indicators and a designated responsible organisation. Civil society organisations are responsible for the volunteering initia-

tive, for example. During revision of the strategy, civil society organisations in the city were consulted by the Community Forum, ensuring a more structured process. However, this may have reduced the likelihood of individual citizens becoming involved. As part of the review, both lead agency and partner agency nominees were validated by their organisations, ensuring transparency and legitimacy and strengthening organisational commitment to the CDB process. One of the goals in the revised strategy is to facilitate community and voluntary sector involvement in the future development of the city through consolidation of the Community Forum, meetings between LCDB voluntary sector members and specific interest groups, an annual review of the needs of voluntary sector representatives on CDBs and the provision of resources and training. Thus, LCDB is facilitating the involvement of individual citizens as well as civil society organisations in its work and in the governance of the city.

This overview of one city's development board illustrates how, in Ireland, the focus of local democratic renewal has been on integrating local government and local development, thereby supplementing representative democracy with associative and participative dimensions and seeking to address the challenges of fragmentation, duplication and perceived democratic distance. The statutory endorsement of CDBs has institutionalised both the right and opportunity for civil society groups to participate in local governance in Ireland. LCDB fosters clear linkages between civil society and the institutions of local government and formalises the interaction between the various sectors. However, it would seem as if in Limerick, as elsewhere, the full democratic potential of the new structures has not been reached. Levels of engagement by the component sectors of LCDB vary according to organisational culture and personal capacity. Although citizens may involve themselves through the Community Forum, there seems to be a lack of awareness and interest among many of Limerick's citizens and limited involvement by some sections of civil society. The involvement of elected representatives has also varied significantly with little evidence of unprompted action. Administrative involvement seems efficient but not innovative. Thus far, the civil society representatives have been articulate, able and politically astute and have been active members of LCDB. However, interviewees expressed the fear that civil society representatives with less capacity and experience might find themselves having little impact on the workings of the Board. So the risk of tokenism has not been eliminated.

As this overview of LCDB shows, Ireland's efforts at local democratic renewal promote formal engagement of civil society in the local governance process and

greater effectiveness with regard to policy-making and implementation. The CDB structures link participative and representative forms of democracy in a meaningful way. The enshrinement of the new structures within the legislative and institutional framework would seem to secure their existence and suggest sustainability but the actual focus is more on their role in enhancing service delivery than on their democratic potential. Systemic change is evident in the interlinking of the various sectors, the increased focus on consultation and collaboration and the wide range of actors involved in policy design and delivery. The role of citizens and civil society has been formalised, the role of politicians expanded and that of officials diffused while their relative positions have been altered by institutionalisation of their involvement. Significantly, the change process was conducted from the centre and the edicts of central government frame the actions of CDBs. At local level, particularist perspectives and agendas still surface and problems regarding representativeness and differing levels of engagement, while diminished, have not disappeared.

5. Copenhagen's neighbourhood councils – reinforcing the role of civil society?

The 2003 analysis of power and democracy in Denmark found evidence of positive adaptation to political and social change, high levels of trust in politicians and the system and significant levels of citizen activism, albeit through non-traditional channels (Togeby et al. 2003; Andersen 2006). Not surprisingly, the Danish system of local governance is perceived as being effective and inclusive with voluntary associations playing a key role in Danish society, while a strong tradition of public and organisational involvement persists (Lidstrom 2001; Rose & Stahlberg 2005). Reform has focussed on increasing participation of citizens and civil society and embedding structures and processes which foster bottom-up policy-making. This reflects the Danish championing of participative and associative forms of democracy in addition to the representative form. This case-study focuses on a neighbourhood council in Copenhagen and its role in reinforcing the role of civil society in the governance process. As in Ireland and France, one of the challenges is reconciling the roles of elected politicians, public servants, citizens, voluntary associations, interest groups and local action groups.

Copenhagen has a population of more than 1.8 million people. Until 2001, ward councils had existed in five districts in Copenhagen but following a referendum, these were abolished and the Copenhagen municipality is now centrally ad-

ministered. Although a wealthy city, urban development in Copenhagen has been uneven and some areas of the city have economic social and political problems which have been exacerbated by the tendency of immigrants to settle in these areas. An innovative approach from both the perspectives of democratic renewal and social inclusion is the 'Kvarterløft' or neighbourhood revitalisation programme. The earliest neighbourhood renewal projects in Copenhagen started in the 1980s but were criticised because of lack of involvement of residents in the decision-making process. From 1993 involvement of residents became a statutory requirement but even after this legislation there was dissatisfaction. Although the initiative for the regeneration projects came from central government, neighbourhood projects involve residents in the design, management and implementation of the projects.

Kvarterløft links national and local levels of government with local residents through a framework prepared at national level and based on four key principles (Entrust 2003a and 2003b)

- Focus on the district
- A holistic approach
- Participation
- Project anchoring

A total investment frame of €160 million was allocated for eleven projects, selected at national level following earlier sifting at municipal level. The municipal Kvarterløft secretariat co-ordinates the seven Copenhagen projects and liaises with both national and local levels. Co-operation agreements for each project were negotiated with clear objectives and quantifiable targets.

Every effort is made to involve residents in all aspects of the projects. 'The residents are involved in the neighbourhood from the start and participate in deciding the projects and solutions on which the project is to follow' (Kvarterloeftssekretariatet 2004: 2). A sub-objective of the projects is the strengthening of social networks in the neighbourhoods, an aspiration which echoes the precepts of democratic theorists cited earlier. The projects are also innovative in their approach to financing. Primarily state funded, they also involve co-financing by foundations. Residents, businesses and locals are involved in financial decisions and financial management of the projects. The particular focus of this case-study is the Norrebro Park Kvarterløft which will be used to illustrate how these social and political objectives are realised.

The Norrebro Park project is a seven-year urban revitalisation project which ran from 2000 to 2007. This inner city area has a population of more than 16,000 residents and has Copenhagen's highest density of population with 197 people per hectare as opposed to a city average of 56. The proportion of young people is 33% higher than the city average and immigrant families make up almost 20% of the population with ethnic groups tending to congregate in certain parts of the district. Because of low levels of educational attainment and high levels of immigration, only 18% of jobs in the area are carried out by residents. The area suffers from democratic deprivation 'due to the want of local politicians, organisation representatives and protagonists' (Lauesen 2003: 18). Kvarterløft was designed to address these challenges by involving citizens and civil society in planning and implementing regeneration policies.

Mobilisation of citizens involved targeting specific population groups, distribution of letters and public notices, newspaper articles and even the incentive of a free beer after meetings! Residents had opportunities to suggest how project money should be spent and which actions should be prioritised. Forty project groups were supported to plan individual projects. After almost a year's work a plan was drafted and delivered to each household for further input. The revised plan was adopted by the municipal council[36]. Procedures were agreed for designation of resident representatives and included a quota system to ensure representation of the main types of residences. A Steering Committee/Board of directors supervises implementation and brings together representatives of residents' associations, NGOs, businesses and municipal and central government administrators. To ensure representation of minority groups one Board member has been selected as a representative of ethnic groups. In a process described as 'project democracy', activity groups are involved in overseeing particular projects and actions and this structure enables individual citizens as well as civil society groups to have a say. Although the majority of the budget (18.7 million) was ring-fenced for housing and open space improvement, a sum of 4.4 million was allocated for holistic projects and 1.6 million was available for involvement of residents, dissemination of information and support for a secretariat. Some of the holistic actions supported include the establishment of residents' committees and social and sports clubs; establishment of 'parent schools' for immigrants and the employment of an integration officer in a school. The range of pro-

36 Kvarterløft allows for plans to be reviewed each year in accordance with residents' suggestions and in response to any change in circumstances

jects demonstrates responsiveness to the needs articulated by locals. Another positive outcome has been the emergence of various networks, sometimes directly linked to projects but frequently issue-based, and usually serving as a consultative mechanism. However, interviewees raised questions about the looseness of these networks and the prospects for their sustainability.

Kvarterløft has produced both tangible and intangible outcomes. The physical improvement of the Norrebro Park area is an impressive policy output and has inculcated a sense of pride and belonging so 'Norrebro Park' is both an object, the city park, and a brand for the area (Ministeriet 2007). Efforts to foster participation have proved successful, creating linkages between citizens, politicians and administrators. The approach supports associative and participative forms of democracy in an area where representative democracy had little significance among residents. Agger (2006) highlights the significance of institutional design in fostering participation and ensuring continuity. The Norrebro Park innovation has a clear institutional design and involves a combination of 'everyday makers' and expert activists but, despite the targeted, localised structures for democratic involvement, problems persist. The concept of Kvarterløft originated at central government level and continues to be ultimately bound by the centre. Municipal authorities have a dominant role in management and implementation of the process despite the level of local autonomy with regard to individual projects. This serves to ensure clear linkages with the institutions of government but bureaucratic requirements and administrative rules limit the scope of some projects and act as a barrier for individuals and groups who have not previously interacted with the bureaucracy. Despite the efforts at mobilisation and inclusion, many residents have not had any involvement. Resource inequalities advantage some activists and technical experts, and there have been instances where long-time activists tried to capture the consultation process to further particular agendas. Questions arise about the representativeness of the representatives and the *ad hoc* nature of some of the groupings. Interviewees drew attention to the way in which cultural norms reduce the likelihood of some ethnic and gender groups participating in the consultative processes. Lack of familiarity with the rules and processes of engagement also reduces the likelihood of continuing engagement by previously marginalised groups – as one interviewee stated, 'it is necessary to learn how to be 'a good citizen' and not all citizens have the desire or the opportunity to do so'.

Local politicians have embraced the concept of Kvarterløft and support the emergent networks. For administrators the new approach can sometimes be prob-

lematic as they are faced with the dilemma of simultaneously satisfying local needs and hierarchical norms. Tension can arise between public servants who have espoused the participative approach and those public servants upholding the traditional hierarchical mode. Furthermore, Agger (2006) found that some citizens perceive as a disadvantage the fact that representatives of the local institutions do not actually live in the area. Has Kvarterløft led to systemic change? For certain periods such as the planning process and for specific projects there would seem to be a decentralisation of power but as yet, there is little evidence of permanent localisation of power. Neither is power distributed evenly between the various local actors as informational and positional inequalities persist. Kvarterløft is an innovative means of fostering active democratic practices and has the potential for replication in other contexts but anchoring the approach, achieving bureaucratic change and increasing and embedding citizen/civil society involvement still proves challenging.

6. Grenoble: formalising consultation and participation.

Traditionally a highly-centralised country, France has undergone significant reform of the structures and processes of local governance. Since the reforms of 1982, there has been an incremental reduction in the uniformity which previously characterised France's administration. As in other countries, sub-national units in France, especially the cities, are becoming important political spaces, wherein public policies are made and implemented and democratic processes are anchored. A number of national initiatives sought to increase participation by allowing consultative referenda, setting gender quotas for election lists and institutionalising consultation. This section examines one exemplar of formal efforts to involve citizens and civil society, namely the consultative committees established in Grenoble.

Grenoble has long been synonymous with democratic experimentation. Regarded as the cradle of the French Revolution, the city has also been the site of innovative measures to foster citizen involvement. During the 1920s, citizens came together spontaneously to form '*Unions de Quartier*' (UQ). Today, the UQ continue to impact on political life by fostering active participation, promoting the general interest of citizens and working to enhance the quality of life. While not part of the system of representative democracy in Grenoble, the UQ have long complemented and supplemented it. Other initiatives had been put in place such as the experimental district consultative committee (Edwards and Hupe 2000) and the consultative

committees for foreign inhabitants (*Conseil Consultatif des Résidents Etrangers de Grenoble*, CCREG) and elderly people (*Conseil Consultatif des Personnes Agées*, CCPA). The *Communauté d' Agglomération Grenobloise*, known as La Métro (which associates 26 municipalities) has been promoting participatory processes since the 1970s. Thus, Grenoble has a history of involving citizens and civil society in the political infrastructure.

Local level reform in France has endeavoured to strike a balance between 'local democracy and effective governance' (Loughlin 2007). The *loi de la démocratie de proximité* of 2002 required all communes of over 80,000 people to establish a network of consultative neighbourhood councils and public service user committees. The legislation indicated that half the members of the councils should be elected citizens and the other half councillors nominated by the municipality. The councils have a two-year renewable term and usually have twenty-five members. They are led by the two co-presidents, one an elected councillor and one a local dweller chosen from the CCS membership. All meetings are held in public. In some cities, such as Marseilles, the UQ became the foundation for the consultative councils but in Grenoble this was not the case. Instead, the city was divided in sectors and six *Conseils Consultatifs de Secteurs* (CCS) were established to facilitate dialogue between citizens, their representatives and the town hall.

The CCS serve mobilising, dissemination and aggregation functions as well as their eponymous consultative role[37]. They orchestrate consultative processes, submit opinions on proposals for municipal projects and facilitate the elaboration of proposals through the use of '*auto-saisines'* (initiated by the CCS) and '*saisines*' (requested by the *Conseil Municipal*). *Saisines* undertaken range from opinions on regeneration proposals and designation of the sectors (in all CCS) to civic education (CCS5) and neighbourhood linkages (CCS6). The state provides an annual budget of approximately €10,000 to meet the administrative costs of each CCS. Training is facilitated for members of the councils and assigned staff within the city council provide support. Initially, the UQ and the CCS in Grenoble operated independently and somewhat antagonistically. Nowadays, the two approaches are complementary, gain mutual benefit from their diverse approaches and ensure a rich associational life in Grenoble.

37 Official documentation from Grenoble's Hotel de Ville states that 'Les CCS sont des lieux d'expression, d'information, de consultation et de proposition sur tout projet, toute initiative ou dossier relevant du secteur'

The outcomes of the various consultative processes facilitated by the CCS are linked to the city's governance processes. For example, CCS4 led a multi-faceted consideration of proposals for regeneration of the Flaubert district using mechanisms such as workshops, reflection groups, visits and *balades urbaines*. The resultant '*avis*' was unanimously adopted at a public meeting and transmitted to the mayor. The monthly magazine of the city administration reported that '*les premières orientations du projet d'aménagement des quartiers Flaubert et Clos d'Or ont été annoncées. Elles s'appuient largement sur l'avis remis par le Conseil Consultatif du secteur 4'* (Ville de Grenoble 2007: 12)[38]. In Grenoble Sud the Consultative council, CCS6, has taken a lead role in the area's drive to engage citizens '*Toute la ville s'engage'*. A strategy for renewal, with seventy-four actions, was agreed in 2003 and is being gradually implemented. In order to monitor implementation of the strategy and ensure that the views of the inhabitants were reflected, an '*Observatoire des Engagements'* was established and was later subsumed into CCS6. The Mayor of Grenoble assesses that the monitoring and evaluation process is effective and '*à fait à mes yeux, la preuve de son intérêt et son utilité'* (Rapport 2006: 1). Accordingly, a similar mechanism '*Les projets de territoire'* is being put in place in other sectors of the city to provide a mechanism for collective observation and evaluation of actions. The examples of CCS4 and CCS6 illustrate how the consultative committee structure facilitates linkage of the perspectives of citizens and civil society with the structures and processes of local government in Grenoble.

It is too early to determine specific results but the CCS architecture does seem to ascertain and assimilate citizen perspectives and foster a structured dialogue between inhabitants and institutions. Those involved in CCS would like a broader role and interviewees referred to growing demands for a participatory budget arrangement, akin to those in Porto Allegre or Bremen. It was also noteworthy that interviewees indicated a gradual change of attitude among many of the city's *fonctionnaires* (bureaucrats/administrators), from a reluctant tolerance of CCS input to a welcome for their insights and a willingness by some administrators to be pro-active in involvement of the committees. The CCS are formally and effectively linked with the institutions of government, thereby guaranteeing their recognition. However, there are flaws in the approach. The CCS structure is aligned to specific domains of action and is orchestrated by the city's politico-administrative institutions so is

38 The first phase of the regeneration project for the Flaubert et Clos d'Or districts has now been outlined. It is based, to a large extent, on the 'avis' submitted by CCS4 (author's translation).

unlikely to engage passive citizens or to surface and take on board considerations other than those directly related to tangible projects. The evidence from Grenoble reinforces the assertions of Sintomer and de Maillard (2007) that the focus is on micro-level issues and topics and that this, combined with their dependence on the mayor, means that they affect policy rather than politics. The assigned role of the CCS may limit their potential to act as a conduit for as wide a range of views as emanates from the *Unions de Quartier*, for example. Furthermore, their positioning as part of the governance infrastructure may restrict their ability to serve the aggregational and oppositional roles outlined in the earlier discussion on civil society.

7. Conclusions

This chapter has examined the impact of democratic renewal on structures and relationships at local level. Having explored the catalysts, theoretical underpinnings and purposes of initiatives to increase democratic participation, the chapter investigated specific attempts to promote greater involvement of citizens and civil society. The cases illustrated a strengthening of the civic infrastructure through formalised relationships with local authorities, relationships which were horizontally anchored but vertically directed. In Ireland, the CDB structure is common to all local authorities but the impact varies according to individual levels of engagement, organisational culture within the bodies represented, the capacity of civil society and political representatives and the adaptability or conservatism of local government officials. In Denmark, Kvarterløft is a strategy limited to particular locations yet linked to the local and national government infrastructure and predicated on enhancing involvement by citizens and civil society. Grenoble's CCS exemplifies a localised approach to the national law which ordered the establishment of consultative councils. The Danish approach provides more opportunities for citizens as individuals to participate than the Irish or French models. All three cases attach great importance to civil society associations as channels of communication and mobilisation and mechanisms for the problem-solving, system improvement and normative rationales delineated by Pratchett.

The theoretical overview in the introduction underlined the importance ascribed to the local level as an arena for democratic participation and the practice of citizenship and synthesised the normative and intellectual validation for democratic re-

newal. Do the initiatives studied embody these theoretical contentions? Table 5.5 links the theoretical frames with the outcomes of the empirical research.

Fischer asks whether we can 'build participatory institutions that establish and mediate procedural and discursive relationships between elite decision-makers, professional experts and the more actively interested members of the public?' (2009: 296). The innovations assessed in this chapter illustrate auspicious but imperfect attempts to do so. There is evidence of reassessment of paradigms. The discourse of participation and democratic renewal is being operationalised in different ways as the empirical evidence of the chapter shows. In each case there has been a reshaping of the institutional context to purposefully accommodate participation and a recalibration of the formal state-society relationship. However, there is little evidence of transformation of the organisational assumptions and institutional norms onto which these renewal innovations have been grafted. Furthermore, there is only qualified affirmation of growth in political identity or political capacity among those involved in the different interventions. Thus the reinvigoration of democracy has been nominal yet noticeable.

Among the tangible outcomes from the renewal efforts are the provision of deliberative arenas; the fostering of strategic planning (on a neighbourhood basis in Norrebro and Grenoble and on a city-wide basis in Limerick) and the tackling of social inclusion issues (on an *ad hoc* basis in Norrebro, on a formal basis in Limerick and in an indirect manner in Grenoble). Intangible outcomes include citizen empowerment and endowment in Norrebro and acknowledgement of the role of civil society in Limerick and Grenoble. The creation or strengthening of networks has been an outcome in all contexts with significant increases in formal and informal collaboration between actors involved in governance of the cities. Kvarterløft has the potential for replication in other contexts and has evolved since its initiation reflecting the input of citizens, organisations and professionals. LCDB is one of thirty-four similar structures in Ireland. The CCS structure in Grenoble demonstrates a localised response framed by national parameters.

Table 5.5. Thematic comparison of strategies for democratic renewal

	Copenhagen	**Grenoble**	**Limerick**
Renewal focus	Participation, project design and implementation	Formal linkage of civil society, citizens and elected representatives	Collaboration and formal partnership
Challenges addressed by renewal effort (cf. Giddens 1998; Fischer 2009)	Lack of engagement	Balancing effectiveness and democracy	Enhancing local democracy and developing efficiency
Contextual/ cultural factors (cf. Wolman 2008)	Poor integration & concentration of socio-economic problems	Reform aimed at rebuilding social and political links 'from below'	Reform of local governance system
Underlying concepts of democracy (cf. Fung 2006)	Participative, associative and 'project ' democracy	Linking participatory and representative forms	Linking representative with participative forms
Purpose (cf. Pratchett 2000)	Problem-solving	Redressing systemic failure & embodying desirable democratic norms	Redressing systemic failure & embodying desirable democratic norms
OUTCOMES (cf. Scharpf 1999, 2000; Fischer 2009). **<u>Effectiveness</u>,** **<u>Legitimacy</u>** **<u>Durability</u>**	 Yes Yes No (project focus)	 Limited but potential Yes	 Limited but potential Yes

		Yes	Yes
Possibility of rep-lication	Yes	Yes	yes
Systemic change	Yes (local)	Yes, because of national edicts	Yes, because of national edicts

Have these strategies for renewing local democracy led to systemic change? LCDB is one element of systemic change aimed at reforming local government in Ireland and enhancing democracy. But, while the system has changed, that change has been embraced to varying degrees by bureaucrats, politicians and civil society activists. Consequently, the degree of change varies from locality to locality and reflects levels of commitment, capacity and collaboration. Kvarterløft in Norrebro Park reflects localised rather than systemic change and there is as yet no indication that the Kvarterløft model will be mainstreamed. The CCS in Grenoble also reflect attempts to change the system. The consultative committees are now embedded in the political structures but the variations between cities, while fostering local responsiveness may increase institutional uncertainty. Despite their institutional anchorage, the primary research intimates that the new structures in all three cases would seem to reflect surface change rather than fundamental shifts in attitudes or political and administrative behaviour. One of the novel and transferable dimensions of the innovations investigated is the manner in which associational/participative forms of democracy are formally linked with representative democracy. A common theme for the cases was the sponsoring role of the state. The various innovations certainly indicate a pro-active role by the state in involving citizens and civil society but on state terms.

The examples from Copenhagen, Limerick City and Grenoble serve to illustrate that the catalysts and contexts for local democratic renewal can contrast and the mechanisms can vary but that the persistent challenges are remarkably similar. Despite state support for the renewal efforts, despite targeted efforts to ensure representativeness, despite innovation and openness the challenges of citizen engagement, organisational responsiveness, personal capacity, bureaucratic adaptation and political pragmatism remain. Yet, the case-studies also demonstrate that structured attempts at engagement do yield results, do increase involvement and lead to greater effectiveness on the part of all actors.

Chapter six

Strong Leadership and Local Democracy: Rivals or Potential Allies?

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Democracy and leadership are never more than uncomfortable allies (Kann 1979: 202).

1. Introduction

Many reforms within local government in the last decades have been preoccupied with efficiency rather than democracy. Following from this the managerial side of local government has been strengthened. Focus in reforms has also been on managers, not political leaders, maybe as a consequence of importing organisational ideas from the private sector. Political leaders have received less attention than managers also within research (Cole 1994). Studies of political leadership are not always very explicit whether the prefix *political* makes any difference compared to leadership in general. The literature all the same indicates that important tools for political leaders are coalition building, persuasion and negotiations.

But also on the political stage strong, visionary and charismatic leadership has come in fashion (see the special issue on local political leadership *Local Government Studies* 2008). The move towards stronger leadership could be seen as a response to a "legitimacy crisis" (Borraz and John 2004: 108) or associated with crisis management as Rudy Giuliano and 9/11 in New York. Less dramatic events could also show a capacity to make things happen as Ken Livingstone and congestion charging in London.

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The main explanation given for success is the personal leadership qualities. This kind of local political leaders are given attention in mass media, to a great extent due to their communicative capacity. They are often outspoken, to some degree even controversial. They seem to combine this with an ability to listen to people's concerns. Also, they inspire confidence of not acting in personal interest nor in the interest of a party elite.

Successful political leadership could be achieved by actually fading out ideology, acting less party political and more encompassing in the interest of the wellbeing and growth of the local community (cf. Borraz and John 2004: 114). This is not to be confused with sheer populism though. Neither does this mean that we adhere to a simple view of leaders as "heroes" or "saviours"; leadership is a dialectical relationship between leader and followers (cf. Collinson 2005). The followers include different stakeholder groups and the electorate which makes the relationship complex and interdependent (Morrell and Hartley 2006: 485).

But how important is the leader for the activities of organizations? Can a change in leadership produce fundamental reform and thereby the solution to the present problems of the public sector? Opinions are divided, but in the main part of management literature the importance of the manager is an obvious starting-point. At least managers themselves believe in managerial importance. Top managers rise to the top on the basis of a series of successful experiences, which lead them to believe in the possibility of substantial intentional control over organizational events (March 1986: 284).

> "If one sits in a magnificent office in a magnificent structure, surrounded by the various accoutrements of power such as limousines, private jets, and large staffs, and engages in activity labelled as management and decision-making, one not only convinces others that one is in control and has power over organizations and substantive events, one is also likely to convince oneself" (Pfeffer 1981: 47).

If people believe then that leadership matters, symbolic action can have real consequences for the sentiments, beliefs, attitudes, or commitment of the organizational participants (Pfeffer 1981: 5). Similar arguments could be voiced in favour of treating political leaders as important even if there is a clear tension in the relation between top managers and top politicians in local government.

The question of borderlines between administrative and political leadership is crucial (Bergström, Magnusson and Ramberg 2008). The contact between citizens and local government is most often with civil servants of different kinds: the teacher in the public school, the planning officer, the manager at the home for elderly etc. Democratic reforms could make the politician a less important mediator between the citizen and civil servants as service providers. Interaction and dialogue between citizens and local government does not necessarily involve politicians. The higher level of education among civil servants contributes to this tendency when it comes to ICT, network-building etc. Preferences could be expressed directly in user boards or customer surveys or even computer-based referenda. Direct links between citizens and administrators are established within the production of welfare services. More and more employees, not elected politicians, get information about the needs and wishes of citizens. They could transmit this information into the political decision-making process and try to secure the interests of people they get in touch with and thereby act as guardians of democracy. Anyhow the role is not easy since their job also demands loyalty towards their employer and acceptance of political ambitions decided in general elections.

Politicians are in modern rhetoric supposed to be more concerned about *what* should be done and leave questions of *how* to managers. Politics should be separated from administration. It could be said that this development is at odds with the traditional role of local politicians, a role where specific knowledge of details is important and where any question could be made "political" if necessary. With managerial reforms being abundant, what influence do reforms in local *democracy* have on the relation politicians-managers? Are reforms giving back some lost ground to elected politicians through, for instance, directly elected mayors? Or are they tipping the balance even more in favour of public officials through reforms as citizen participation, consumer democracy etc?

Giving illustrations from Italy, Sweden, and UK we try to address the following questions:

Can stronger political leadership co-exist with representation and actually lead to a revival of local politics? Could individual leadership significantly change the face of local democracy?

The questions are rephrasing some classical concerns: How important is the leader? Is strong leadership dangerous?

In this chapter we argue that the perceived crisis in local government in many countries could be described as the crisis of parties, *not* local democracy in itself. Also, strong and active leadership does not necessarily mean that democracy suffers. On the contrary, leaders could possibly re-invigorate local democracy (see Fenwick and Elcock 2005: 63).

> "Leadership is crucial to the functioning and success of local governance. The politics of decentralization, networks, participation, partnerships, bureaucratic reform, rapid policy change and central intervention need powerful but creative figures to give a direction to local policy-making. In a time of institutional fragmentation and complexity, leaders can make the shifting framework of individuals and organizations work together. They can recreate local identities and senses of purpose in an age where locality has lost its association with traditional industries and well-defined spaces of economic activity." (Borraz and John 2004: 112)

Successful leadership along the lines indicated above might well be deviant cases; there are indications that, for instance, the personal influence of local government elites in Sweden is not growing over time (Szücs and Strömberg 2009). What we are interested in here is not statistical averages though; we discuss whether it is possible in practice to reconcile leadership and democracy. This goes beyond the trivial. "The idea that leadership makes a difference is a truism in the study of urban politics" (Gains et. al. 2009: 75). The point is that leaders could make a difference even if they are constrained, accountable and with only limited resources (Gains et al. 2009: 92). Also, it is *not* a zero-sum game. Strong leadership does not even necessarily mean anti-party politics (see Leach and Wilson 2008 for a different view).

To sum up, we propose that elements of successful local government leadership include:

1. *Visible* leadership with a sense for symbolic action.
2. Visionary and creative leadership, giving direction and a sense of purpose.
3. A communicative capacity.
4. Encompassing leadership, with skills in coalition building.
5. Less of party politics in a narrow sense.

When discussing leadership we will relate this to changes in local government. Renewal of local government could take place through different kinds of changes. There could be changes in *structures:* direct election of mayors being the most prominent example. There could be changes in *processes:* the importance of mass media gives totally new roles for agenda-setting, fast responses and more “populist” approaches to politics than before. A new set of *actors* appears on the political scene. On the one hand more professional politicians appear, people that have spin-doctors to guide their activities. There is no place for amateurs. On the other hand people who are not associated with politics see it as a dirty business or an arena for self-interest to acquire prominent positions. Mayors from private enterprises or universities are, in the eyes of the public, not connected to the old regime. A *cultural* change towards individualism means that new demands are put on leadership.

Having this as a background, in this chapter we look into the possibilities for a visible and strong political leadership in the case of cities/municipalities in Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom respectively.[39] The structural preconditions are quite different as regards autonomy of the local level in terms of local taxes, central control and general competence in legislation. Italy and the UK have experienced reforms aiming at strengthening the role of top political leaders while Sweden is reluctant to abandon the collective traits of local political life. All the same, even in Sweden a tendency to look for strong individual leadership could be noticed. Different national systems, with or without directly elected mayors, give room for manoeuvre for strong leaders to handle complex decision-making processes. Strong leadership seems to be possible *despite* the restrictions given in legislation. All the same, some hesitation concerning the desirability of strong leadership is voiced. For instance, very few local authorities in England opt for directly elected mayors when given the chance.

By giving some examples from the three countries we hope to provide an impression of what could be achieved although we admit that this picture might deviate from the general state of leadership in other cities/municipalities in the countries we study. The approach is in a sense Popperian; we illustrate that new leadership practices *could* work, not against, but in favour of local democracy. It could be seen as a “plausibility probe” in the words of Eckstein (1975). Cases selected are somewhat “extreme” and chosen for getting a point across (Flyvbjerg 2006: 229).

39 Cases researched by Gianoli (Italy), Bergström (Sweden) and Rao (UK).

By choosing three countries with very different local government systems and reform history the hypotheses could be "tested" in diverse settings. The case studies are based on different kinds of information including interviews but rely mostly on secondary sources. They address the same general problem but are structured differently depending on the context of the cases.

2. Local leadership and directly elected mayors in Italy

During the 1990s a radical reform process changed the Italian system of local government and substantially increased its autonomy. The political crisis of the early 1990s that revealed widespread corruption was behind the transformation that led to the modification of the Italian electoral system at both national and local level. The political agenda became dominated by three interrelated issues: imbalance between legislative and executive powers, predominance of political parties, and lack of a strong leadership within a governance context. The instability of the political system at both national and local level can be explained by weak executives and strong legislative bodies under the control of fragmented political parties. By way of illustration, in the period 1972-1989, more than 40 per cent of the municipal cabinets survived for one year, with only 1 per cent lasting for the entire legislature (Baldini 2002). Before the reforms, the Italian system of local government mirrored the national parliamentary model: the council was elected by citizens through proportional representation and a party lists system, and the council in turn elected the mayor and the cabinet. The mayor and the cabinet were therefore the expression of the coalition of political parties with a majority in the council.

The direct election of mayors in Italy was introduced in 1993. Simultaneously, the system of proportional representation was modified by establishing a premium for the parties associated with the winning mayoral candidate. The reform also established a council elected from party lists on a proportional basis, with the parties linked to the winning mayoral candidate obtaining 60 per cent of the seats. As a result, a new relationship and a more clear-cut separation between the legislative and executive bodies were brought about. According to the new arrangements, the council exercises political and administrative direction and control. By contrast, the executive body or cabinet is composed of aldermen, is headed by the mayor, and has wide decision-making powers and responsibilities (Fabbrini 2000).

It is important to stress that the members of the cabinet are appointed directly by the mayor and no longer by the council. As a matter of fact, cabinet members cannot belong to the council in order to strengthen the separation between the executive and legislative bodies. Whereas prior to 1993 reform the composition of the municipal government was intended to strike a balance among the interests of the parties in the majority coalition, since 1993 the formation of municipal governments has reflected the fact that the cabinet is the mayor's executive body with no direct relationship with the parties that make up the council (Baccetti 1998; Fabbrini 2000). Instead of the council being the only institution benefiting from direct popular legitimacy, as from 1993 the electorate directly confers legitimacy to the mayor and expresses support for the programme of the municipal government. As a result of the reform, the crucial institutional relationship is therefore between the mayor and the electorate, as the mayor has the overall responsibility for the administration of the municipality (Vandelli 1997; Vandelli 2004).

Local government reform: effects on local leadership

Without doubt the local government reform has strengthened the position of the mayor within the local governance environment. Mayors elected in various Italian cities, such as Valentino Castellani in Turin and Massimo Cacciari in Venice, have gained great personal prestige and, in some cases, have moved to prominent positions at national level. However, directly elected mayors have acquired increased prominence also in small and medium-size municipalities. Throughout Italy, directly elected mayors have been better able to negotiate with other levels of government (Magnier 2003).

Local government reform has brought about a greater accountability of mayors to their electorate, as voters have been able to resort to retrospective voting in order to reward or punish mayors in office. Furthermore, directly elected mayors, by virtue of the institutional powers granted to them, have on the whole, pursued their programmes unconstrained by the consensual system that had regulated Italian local democracy before 1993. This has given greater visibility to their actions and, in some instances, highlighted their new governmental capacity. The personalisation of local politics has represented an unprecedented novelty in Italy, historically characterised by inefficient and static governments at all levels. By contrast, the reform has meant a mayor who was more the representative of the municipality and its citizenry than of a political party.

One of the fundamental effects of the changes in the Italian system of local government has been the stronger position of the mayor within the local governance context. By being an executive figure and a primary decision maker, the directly elected mayor has been better able to provide leadership for the wider community, address issues crossing organisational boundaries and requiring the co-operation of a range of different agencies, develop partnerships with private sector players, act as advocate for the municipality, secure resources, and lead the preparation and implementation of strategic plans. Some mayors, especially but not exclusively in the larger municipalities, have learnt to become mediators, negotiators and relationship-builders, and the reform has helped them to develop those skills which are essential to effectively act within a local governance environment such as setting the overall direction, matching resources to priorities, and building alliances. This is epitomised by the development and adoption of strategic plans in various Italian municipalities, Turin being one of the most prominent cases.

Though not representative of Italian local authorities' experience with directly elected mayors, Turin constitutes one of the most interesting examples to investigate the relationship between local government reform embodied by the direct election of mayors and local leadership. It also sheds light on the potential virtuous circles between leadership on the one hand and democratic legitimacy and decision-making effectiveness on the other. The analysis of local leadership in Turin demonstrates how a leadership role can be effectively exercised only if it is perceived as legitimate and if it is characterised by a strong societal influence.

Local leadership in Turin

Turin, located in the centre of Italy's northwest Piedmont region, is Italy's fourth largest city, with a total population of some 900,000 inhabitants. For over a century Italian automotive and industrial capital and home of the car manufacturer FIAT, until the 1990s Turin's local political power had little control over the territorial development of the municipality and surrounding metropolitan area. In the main, this was due to industrial conflicts and institutional instability. Ineffective government caused by a vacuum in political leadership, resulted in a piecemeal approach to local development, lack of transparency in decision-making, confrontational approach between stakeholders, and impossibility of enrolling economic interests as partners of a collective process.

However, since the early 1990s Turin has been undergoing a process of substantial transformation characterised by a new political leadership embodied by the

directly elected mayor and a novel policy and implementation process in the form of a strategic plan. This process has culminated with the Winter Olympic Games hosted by Turin in 2006. The case of Turin's strategic plan, developed and implemented under the leadership of the directly elected mayor, illustrates the positive effect of the institutional reforms on the municipal leadership capacity of the city within a governance context.

Within the Italian context strategic planning can be regarded as a relatively new process, adopted by only a limited number of local authorities (Formez 2004). Lacking a legislative or regulatory framework, strategic planning at the local level is essentially a voluntary process directed at fostering economic development and at building territorial identity through a set of multi-sectoral interventions. In the case of Turin, first city in Italy to adopt a strategic plan, the aim was to eradicate the dependence on FIAT and the strong influence of the car manufacturer's strategies on the local physical, economic and social development. This involved diversifying the city's economic base and repositioning it within the European context, and also to reform the processes of decision-making and policy implementation (Magnier 2003).

The first directly mayor elected in Turin after the reform, Valentino Castellani had the support of a broad coalition of non-political actors, comprising among others the local chamber of commerce and the university, determined to put forward a candidate who was the expression of civil society. Castellani's key objective was to overcome the de-industrialization crisis and to promote the city as a diversified local economy based on different sectors such as robotics, information and communication technologies, design and tourism, by using the strategic plan as an inclusive tool able to provide overall direction to the development process of the whole metropolitan area and to ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders. This was made possible by the strengthening of the powers assigned to the directly elected mayor, which brought about a new style of local leadership based on the capacity to promote integrating processes and co-operative dynamics (Pinson 2002).

After the re-election of Castellani, in 1998 the Development Forum, co-ordinated by the mayor and consisting of some thirty representatives of Turin's most important economic, social and cultural organisations, launched the process to develop the strategic plan. Working groups were set up to define both the strategic lines and the concrete actions of the plan, and to establish networks of relations between relevant stakeholders. A consultative committee was established to ensure the inclusion of the wider civil society's interests. The plan was signed in February

2000 by the mayors of the municipalities which are part of Turin's metropolitan area, by the president of the province, and by civil society representatives (Associazione Torino Internazionale 2000). To implement the strategic plan a political body (Turin International Association) acting as trustee of the contract set up between the signatories was established, chaired by the mayor and comprising representatives of Turin's key economic, social and cultural organisations. This was complemented by a technical body (Turin International Agency) responsible for the follow-up of projects, and the Metropolitan Conference, a co-ordination body to ensure political agreement between all municipalities of the metropolitan area involved in the process.

In 2001, Sergio Chiamparino was elected mayor of Turin with the backing of a centre-left coalition partly overlapping with the one that had supported Castellani. His aim was to implement and improve what the Castellani administration had started. While the strategic planning process was unfolding, Turin won the bid to host the 2006 Winter Olympics, which added momentum to many of the strategies and projects being developed. Besides fostering a sense of civic pride and shared purpose, the award of the 2006 Winter Olympics contributed to reinforcing the link between the leadership of the local elected mayor and innovative forms of decision-making. In July 2006 and under the leadership of Chiamparino the strategic plan was updated in order to respond to the evolving socio-economic context and the new challenges. The second strategic plan focused on investment in human resources and innovation as the cornerstone for completing the transformation of the city (Associazione Torino Internazionale 2006).

It can therefore be concluded that over the last fifteen years, local policies in Turin have been directed towards the development of a partnership framework able to facilitate the implementation of an integrated and long-term strategy for the redevelopment of the economic base of the city, its internationalisation, and the redefinition of its image. The directly elected mayors, Castellani and Chiamparino, have played a pivotal role in this process. The experience of Turin shows that the leadership provided by a strong institutional figure, the directly elected mayor, has been of fundamental importance to guide and steer a complex governance environment and to bring about innovative decision-making structures and processes and a new type of political capacity. It also emphasises the importance of effective co-ordination and leadership. Managing complex networks of interdependent actors requires the development of flexible and diversified arrangements to support local decision-

making, and of innovative forms of control and influence (Genieys, Ballart and Valerié 2004).

The leadership of mayors Castellani and Chiamparino include elements that we identified in the introduction. They have worked with strategic plans giving a new direction for the city and its development. Events such as the Olympic Games have contributed to an increased visibility, which demands strong communication skills. New partnerships have led to the evolution of new co-operative dynamics. All this within a framework where Italian mayors have a different and more independent relation to the political parties. They represent the municipality and its citizenry more than a political party.

3. Local leadership and decision-making in Britain

In Britain, the Local Government Act, 2000 radically altered local government decision-making since the establishment of the framework of local democracy in the nineteenth century. The Act expressed New Labour's intention to 'modernise' local authorities, and provided for new constitutions and executive arrangements including directly elected mayors and the establishment of overview and scrutiny committees. To ensure that local authorities are equipped to function in this new era, the wholesale modernisation of political structures was mandated, together with the improvement of standards of conduct within councils.

The Government's stated intention in introducing this legislation was to end the reliance on the committee system, rooted in the nineteenth century, which enabled councils to progress decisions through their committees, and all councillors, including those from the minority parties, were able to participate in decision-making. The committee system of decision-making was attacked for its alleged inefficiency, opaqueness and lack of accountability. Few local people, the government argued, know who runs their council, or who to complain to when things go wrong: 'people identify most readily with an individual, yet there is rarely any identifiable figure leading the local community.' This shortcoming is attributed not to the failings of local politicians themselves, but to the system within which they are forced to work. New executive arrangements were therefore required.

It was the first time any government has acted to change the internal management of local government since the system was established in the nineteenth century. The novelty of the Blair government's proposals lay in their conception of

community leadership. The 2000 Act placed great emphasis on the emergence of visible and effective leadership that would allow for 'a clearly identified executive to give strong leadership to communities and clarity to decision taking' (DETR 1999: 19). A small executive body of councillors will provide for community leadership, while the majority will play only a representative role. The government maintains that 'each role can only be fully effective when it is separated from the other.'

The executive is intended to exercise political leadership in the local community, representing the locality to other bodies, and negotiating with government, with national and international public bodies, as well with companies to attract inward investment. The executive role would be to propose the policy framework and implement policies within the agreed framework. The role of backbench councillors would be to represent their constituents, share in the policy and budget decisions of the full council, suggest policy improvements, and scrutinise the executive's policy proposals and their implementation. Such separation would speed up decision-making, enhance responsiveness and enable local authorities to meet community needs. Increased transparency will enable people to measure the executive's actions against the policies on which it was elected, and thus sharpen local political debate and increase interest in local elections.

This idea of a clear separation of roles underlies all three of the basic models put forward in the Act: *a directly elected mayor with a cabinet; a directly elected mayor and council manager; and a cabinet with a leader*. A directly elected mayor would serve as the political leader for that community, supported by a cabinet drawn from among the council members. In the second model, a directly elected mayor's role would be primarily one of influence, guidance and leadership, delegating strategic policy and day-to-day decision-making to the council manager. Under the cabinet and leader model, a leader would be elected by the council and the cabinet would be made up of councillors, either appointed by the leader or elected by the council. A five-year evaluative study commissioned by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (now Department for Communities and Local Government) which concluded in early 2007 showed majority of local authorities to have opted for the leader cabinet system (81 per cent), twelve authorities (3 per cent) mayoral systems (11 mayor cabinet and one mayor council manager) and the remainder of the smaller ones (15 per cent) to have maintain a modified streamlined committee system (Stoker et. al. 2007: 13).

Although the advantages of having any strong executive have been disputed on the grounds that it could lead to undue personalisation, concentration of power and leave ordinary councillors with too little influence, elected mayors have remained central to New Labour's plans for the reform of local government. A directly elected mayor is seen as providing a clear 'voice' for the local area. Such a focus of authority would establish clearer lines of accountability locally, by making it explicit who should be held responsible when things go wrong. At the same time, through by-passing the traditional committee cycle, mayoral power would expedite decision-making and make it easier to get things done (Rao 2005). However, only a handful of local authorities were persuaded by these arguments and took the view that the government's objectives could equally well be served under a leader and cabinet system.

How well did these reforms work out? The majority of authorities surveyed for the ODPM study strongly agreed that the 2000 Act had delivered strong leadership, with the new executives proving effective in providing a vision for the area. The study concluded that leaders and executive councillors were much more *visible* to local communities with named portfolio holders more clearly identifiable as decision-makers.

As well as encouraging effective leadership and enhancing democratic legitimacy, the 2000 Act sought to introduce checks and balances to the operation of executive decision-making through the introduction of procedures to make decision-making transparent, the introduction of a scrutiny system and a new ethical framework.

As to transparency, the study found that in all leader-cabinet and mayoral authorities a forward plan is published showing a schedule of forthcoming executive decisions. However, the extent to which this is made accessible varies and the plans are more often used by officers than councillors and the public. The evidence on scrutiny arrangements is mixed, due to the difficulties faced by councillors in adapting to an entirely new role, combined with the reluctance of backbench councillors in majority parties to challenge executive decision-making. Three quarters of scrutiny committees in the ODPM study reported using scrutiny to explore innovative forms of service delivery, although some leaders and chief officers raised doubts about the robustness of scrutiny.

The London Borough of Lewisham

Having established an empirical base for national picture for modernisation and change, we now turn to examine a single case study as an example of these processes of changed work on the ground. What follows is based on an extended period of observational research and interviews carried out by the author over several years. It also draws upon material generated by the case study authority and other published secondary sources.

Situated in the south-east of London, the borough of Lewisham had a population of 248,922 in the 2001 Census, 66 per cent of whom were white, 12 per cent Black Caribbean, and 9 per cent Black African. There are also small minorities of South Asian and Chinese people. Unusually for an inner London borough, 50 per cent of Lewisham's households are owner-occupiers. With the exception of the period 1968-72, when the Conservative party swept to victory across London, Lewisham remained under Labour control until 2006, when a resurgence of Liberal Democrats and Greens deprived Labour of their natural majority. This did not however, render the council ungovernable, as in the meantime Lewisham had radically reformed its decision-making structures to vest executive authority not in the council's leaders, but in a directly elected mayor. This it accomplished in a series of stages. Prior to the Local Government Act, 2000 Lewisham abolished the committee system and adopted the Westminster-style cabinet system. The leader of the council was given the title of 'Mayor of Lewisham', a major change from the system universally adopted elsewhere, in which the mayor was an annually rotating ceremonial figure.

The justification of selecting Lewisham as a case study is that the borough has been for some time an archetype of the new local government orthodoxy, with a long tradition of community participation. When England experimented for the first time with a directly elected mayor in 2002, Lewisham was one of a small number of councils that successfully adopted the radically different model. Moreover, such was the enthusiasm for a mayoral system that the authority had adopted in advance an executive mayor model prior even to the election. The then leader of the majority Labour group assumed the role of executive mayor and then went on to be publicly elected to that office in 2002. He was subsequently re-elected in 2006 and 2010 becoming, in the process, one of the stars of local government. As a case study, Lewisham brings together a focus on mayoral power with all its distinctive characteristics of widespread civic engagement, cross sector partnerships and devolution. At a time when the great majority of local councils in England were resisting this

radical option of directly elected mayor, Lewisham seized the opportunity and became an exemplar of modern local government.

The starting point for Lewisham's transformation was recognition of how deep the alienation was of local people from their councils. In accord with the Government's own analysis of the problems of community leadership, a Lewisham survey revealed that only about six per cent of local residents could, unprompted, name the then Leader of the Council. Even fewer could name one of their three local ward councillors. A specially appointed Lewisham commission had proposed the move to a mayoral system with a mayor elected at large rather than indirectly by way of the largest party group elected onto the Council. A 1998 survey had revealed that some 58 per cent of residents wanted a directly elected mayor; and in 1999, some 77 per cent approved the proposal to hold a referendum on the issue (Lewisham 2005).

Thus, when the decision to hold a mayoral referendum was announced, it was not met with any great resistance within the Labour group, although the other parties were split over the issue. The single most important issue in the debate over a directly elected mayor was not *how* the mayor was to be elected but the *powers* that the newly elected mayor would have. Those councillors who opposed the proposal did so on the grounds that it will give enormous powers to one individual and reduce backbench councillors to 'small voices at the sidelines'. After putting its proposals to the public in a successful referendum held in 2001, Lewisham became one of just two London boroughs which elected its first mayor under the provisions of the new council constitution (NCC) legislation.

Only 26 per cent of electors voted in the first mayoral election, which was held under the Supplementary Vote (SV) system. Labour candidate Steve Bullock, a former council leader, gained some 20,000 votes on the first count and over 4,500 on the second count, defeating the Conservative candidate. Overall, Steve Bullock gained a 45 per cent share of the votes cast in the first round of the mayoral election. When the votes were reallocated after the second round he gained 71 per cent of these votes. Since Mayor Bullock's election, the number of residents who are able, unprompted, to name the Mayor of Lewisham has increased from 16 per cent in 2002 (some six months after the first election) to 38 per cent in December 2005, a rating higher than for Lewisham's three local Members of Parliament in Lewisham.

In so far as popular engagement with the new mayoral system can be gauged from turnout and recognition statistics, it is clear that the directly elected mayoral experiment in Lewisham has taken strong roots. Mayor Bullock was re-elected in May 2006 gaining more than 22, 000 first preference votes, before the allocation of

second preferences, against the Liberal Democrat candidate who gained 12,389 votes. Mayor Bullock picked up a further 3,000 votes and a Liberal Democrat almost 6,500 giving the mayor a clear win with more than 25,000 votes – a larger number than his first election. His victory was narrower with just 57 per cent of the second round votes, of an increased turnout of 33.8 per cent. This endorsement of his leadership strengthened the mayor's role at a time when his own party slumped badly in the concurrent council elections. Labour lost overall control gaining just 26 of the 54 council seats and now faced an opposition of 17 Liberal Democrats, 6 Greens, 3 Conservatives and 2 Socialists.

The role of the mayor ranges beyond being the elected political executive with responsibility for the functions and activities of the Council. He also chairs the multi-agency Lewisham Strategic Partnership (LSP) putting him in a key position to influence such local public services as policing, health services as well as locally delivered national services such as those employment services. This multi-agency role enhances the clarity and visibility of the mayor's leadership, which was further developed by his spearheading a range of community consultation and participation initiatives.

The four key elements of the government's plan were to promote visibility and democratic legitimacy, accountability, transparency and ethical standards. The first of these, to achieve high profile and clearly accountable community leadership, was certainly realised in Lewisham. The council also put in place effective mechanisms for overview and scrutiny of executive decisions. The overview and scrutiny committee (O&S committee) appoints a series of select committee for specific topics as well as a business panel and education business panel. The main O&S committee meets at least once a year and the select committees at least three times. At the beginning of the year, each select committee draws up a work programme and is required to 'specifically take into account the views of members of that select committee who are not members of the largest political group'. The business panel oversees the proposed work of the select committees and devises a co-ordinated programme to avoid any duplication. All councillors except members of the executive may sit on the O&S committee although no individual member may be involved in scrutinising a decision in which they have been involved. The select committees and the business panel have the power to carry out their own investigations of the options for future policy and can appoint advisers to assist them, conduct surveys, hold public meetings and commission research.

The O&S committee and its select committees may scrutinise and review any decision made or actions taken within their remit. They may call for documentation and can require the mayor, deputy mayor, other executive member, the chief executive or any executive director to appear before them to explain decisions taken, the extent of implementation of council policy and the effectiveness of their performance. The O&S committee and its subordinate bodies have the power to 'call in' executive decisions and if they do so within seven days of the decision being promulgated no action can be taken. Having called in a decision for review, they may refer it back to the decision-maker for reconsideration or to the full council where it judges that the executive decision is contrary to policy or inconsistent with the budget. There is an exception to the call-in procedure in matters of urgent decision, although in these cases a decision has to be certified as urgent and have the agreement of the chief executive. Although the council has clearly defined structures to enable backbench councillors to scrutinise executive, the role itself has been slow to develop. As the Mayor commented, 'on the whole scrutiny tends to be reactive and not a lot of use is made of opportunities to do blue skies thinking'. The chief executive agreed, adding 'councillors are struggling with questions of what to scrutinise…. Many councillors tend to question the practice of management rather than policy and performance.

In order to enhance transparency in decision-making, Lewisham developed elaborate structures for consultation with the public. The council's consultation and engagement strategy for 2004-7 aims to ensure that the views of citizens and other stakeholders inform policy development. The strategy is specifically aimed at guaranteeing that consultation would be effective and meaningful for those involved and that consultation informs decision-making. It also aims to ensure that 'all communities (geographic or interest) within Lewisham are able to participate effectively'. The Mayor holds locally based 'question time' events which are complemented by area forums that are attended by councillors and officers and consist of presentations on local public problems. These events give the public opportunities to raise questions about service provision and increase accountability in an open forum. The Mayor has a consultation board consisting of officers and members to oversee the strategy. In approving consultations, the board ensures quality standards are maintained and that 'consultation fatigue', through repeated consultations to the same people, is minimised (Quirk 2006).

Other novel and creative approaches to consultation in Lewisham include citizen juries, the development of a Creative Citizenship conference and the Rights and

Participation project with 'looked after' children and young people. One of Mayor Bullock's striking innovations is the creation of the post of 'Young Mayor' (and 'Deputy Young Mayor') who are supported by a dedicated young advisory group drawn from the community. The Young Mayor holds office for a year and has a budget of £25,000 to spend on improving services for young people in the borough. The Young Mayor meets frequently with Mayor Bullock and his cabinet. The council also launched a town centre re-development project engaging street market traders to open up discussions about town centre plans. A range of mechanisms is deployed to carry out consultation from traditional quantitative questionnaire surveys and focus groups, to more recently introduced techniques such as texting and the authority-wide E-panel. These newer mechanisms are in direct response to changes in public expectations and lifestyles: 61 per cent of Lewisham residents have personal access to the Internet at home, work or in a public place (Lewisham 2004). An increasing number of them want to make use of the Internet to provide online feedback to the Council about those issues that they feel matter most and are comfortable using the Internet as a route.

In common with other local authorities in England, Lewisham council established a standards committee to monitor breaches of the member and employee codes of conduct and any other relevant law or regulation. All of these innovations have taken route readily in Lewisham which has long had a reputation as one of the most effective and well-run local authorities in the UK. Lewisham's appetite for change was demonstrated by their virtual pre-emption of the statutory requirements to consider new forms of decision-making with, uniquely, an executive mayor being created in advance of the legislation. The national standing of Lewisham in British public administration was testified by the knighthood awarded to the foundation Mayor, Steve Bullock, and the Chancellor's appointment of the Chief Executive, Dr Barry Quirk, as the efficiency champion for local government.

Referring to the introduction we could state that a directly elected mayor tends to be more visible and well known by voters. Especially new approaches to consultation in Lewisham show signs of being creative. Cross sector partnerships and widespread engagement also tend to make local politics less confrontational. The case of Steve Bullock seems to include all the elements for successful local government leadership.

4. Sweden: mayors in a system without mayors

Local government is a very important part of the Swedish public sector in terms of share of expenditure, services provided and number of employees. Every municipality has a directly elected *municipal council*. This council makes the decisions about the budget, the local income tax rate and other important decisions. The *executive committee* is however given a central role in supervising local administration, drafting the budget, co-ordinating operations etc. The chairman of this committee is a full-time position. In Sweden there are no formal mayors. In fact, in many cities there has been a struggle between the chairman of the city council and the chairman of the executive committee who should be regarded as the foremost representative of the city. In practice, the chairman of the executive committee is the strong person in local politics even if the traditional insignia of the most prominent office are invested in the chairman of the council. The tradition has it that parties in general, the collective entities, have a hegemonic position in local political life. Often politicians do not choose to talk about themselves as "leaders" but as "trustees". With a consensus culture so dominant for a long time in Swedish local government the lack of leadership considerations is hardly surprising. In a situation with a proportionate election system and multi-candidate party lists a focus on individuals is less likely (Bergström et. al. 2008).

When leadership questions are addressed, it is often within administration while leadership in politics is taken for granted. The rise of New Public Management ideas has led to a number of conflicts when managers have tried to pursue a more active stance, running into political resistance that often results in the manager's resignation. So, even if political leadership is not formally vested in one person, the Swedish system allows for an articulate individualisation of leadership also in the political sphere. A number of things contribute to this. An element of choice of individual candidates on the party list was introduced in 1998. If more than 5 per cent of the voters in local elections tick a candidate on the ballot this candidate bypasses the order made by the party. The consequences of this reform have not been very dramatic but have meant that, for instance, some candidates invest in personal election campaigns, sometimes against the intentions of party leadership. The development of the Internet also means that politicians can have a personal website, and maintaining a blog has become popular. The focus is naturally on the individual. In addition, the number of parties without a national or even regional organisation,

often with candidates with strong personalities in leading positions, has increased at the local level (Erlingsson 2008).

What we are dealing with here is “unexpected” leaders who could be said to have “mayoral qualities”. There are, of course, examples of leaders who have a massive (single party) majority backing them up; emperors in their own town. Examples could be municipalities run by the conservative party (Moderaterna) like Danderyd and Vellinge or strongholds for the Social Democratic party like Piteå[40]. But we turn our interest to leaders who have to work for their position; they do not represent a traditional dominant party in their local government. Sweden has the same election day for all levels of government, which really should work *against* strong differences in election outcomes between levels. This is especially true since the traditionally dominant Social Democratic party has always maintained that there is a strong link between political activities at different levels; the so-called local government connection. However, the leaders in question seem to unite people around local interests of growth and employment, irrespective of ideological battles. Perhaps it is because they give the impression that they are “fatherly figures” (they are not surprisingly men) who could can achieve things from a very non-partisan standpoint.

In Sweden, the most well-known examples of local leaders, against all odds, are perhaps Roland Åkesson in Mönsterås where the Centerparty is exceptionally strong locally and, Stig Henriksson in Fagersta, who represents a party that is normally far from powerful in local politics. The success story of Stig Henriksson has lead to intense media coverage. He also has an interest in reflecting on the conditions for local politics and leadership and communicating his thoughts through different media. This means that there are a lot of secondary sources to use in an analysis of his leadership.

Stig Henriksson in Fagersta

The example that we choose to focus on is a city, Fagersta, where a party has achieved an impressive electoral support, exceeding by far the average figures. This is a small city[41] in the middle of Sweden with approximately 12,000 inhabitants. Traditionally, ironworks dominated the city’s industry and when this sector under-

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40 Interestingly enough the absolute majorities in Danderyd and Vellinge were lost in the local elections of 2010.

41 In other countries Fagersta might be labelled town.

went radical transformations this lead to problems. On the political scene the Social Democratic party had a very strong position but this is no longer true. An unholy alliance of other parties took over the power under the leadership of Stig Henriksson from the Left Party of Sweden (Vänsterpartiet). Henriksson's party's share of votes has progressively increased. In 1980, the party was the smallest in the council. In the elections of 1998, the party doubled its votes to 44 per cent and Stig Henriksson became the chairman of the executive committee. In 2010, the party won 55.6 per cent of the votes in the local government elections as compared to 8.8 per cent in the national elections in the same city. In comparison, the national average of Vänsterpartiet in the local elections 2010 was 5.6 percent. Not only has the party succeeded in attracting ten times as many votes (on the average), but it has also managed to do this in successive elections.

This success can, to a very large extent, be attributed to Stig Henriksson as a person and the unorthodox way he represents a normally rather marginal party. He has not been afraid to make changes leading to a reduction of services. When, for instance, 40 per cent of the budget for public transport was cut, his comment was: "A bus driver alone does not constitute public transport" (Dalademokraten 2007). He has also continuously lowered taxes, which is contrary to expectations.

In an article in *Dagens Samhälle* (No 28 2006) he describes the most important question in the election as "formulating a tale about the future". A book with a contribution from Stig Henriksson, states: *The future is not what it used to be* (Teknikföretagen 2009). According to Henriksson people seek individual solutions and are not prepared to settle for standard solutions, queues and lack of information. Nostalgia will not help overcome difficulties and no special monetary aid is to be expected from the state.

It is necessary to have a broad consensus in important questions. Even the smallest parties are represented in committees, which they could not achieve by themselves. This is done out of a concern for parties (*Magazin24* 2008). More time and energy is to be spent on development issues so that politics is not reduced to questions about allocation of resources that are never enough. Instead of complaining about money you do not have, you should discuss what to do with the money you actually have to spend. Stig Henriksson formulates a credo: Democracy is not about inventing new forms but an attitude and a culture that should penetrate work every day (SALAR 2008).

Growth and employment is important. Fagersta has a very good financial situation. On average during the period 2000-2009, Fagersta had the biggest surplus per

capita in local government economic results among all Swedish municipalities (Dagens Samhälle No 24 2010). The former chief economist of the Swedish Federation of Local and Regional Authorities commented that, "leadership is a decisive factor behind a good economical situation" (ibid). The neighbouring municipalities are all experiencing economical problems and have difficulties achieving consensus on tough decisions.

To achieve results it is of utmost importance and necessary to have a pragmatic approach to politics. Stig Henriksson consequently claims that voters are not interested in political labels as long as they see good results (Dagens Arena September 6 2010). This also means that formal documents and policies are less important. Traditional local ideological borders could then be crossed which is not the case at the national level. The reasons for success often indicated are the personal chemistry between the involved party representatives and an agreement not to emphasize ideological differences. It was apparent in Fagersta that this is also a reaction against a Social Democratic party that seems to have got stuck in administrating what has already been achieved. This example shows that even within such a collective system as in Sweden, there are chances for individuals to become prominent.

So, has democracy lost out in the process? Cooperation, not confrontation is a main concern. If political differences are underplayed we might suspect a drop in voter turnout. This is not the case. The turnout in the latest local election (2010) was 78.7 per cent, which was a bit lower than the national average (81.6 per cent), but only marginally lower than municipalities in the surrounding region. Also in a report investigating Fagersta and seven other municipalities and cities in the region, Fagersta scores high on participation (Kvalitetsnätverk Bergslagen 2007). The city's work to create a dialogue and participation is held up as a good example. In a questionnaire to citizens Fagersta scores higher than other cities/municipalities on all the questions about the chances of influencing the development of the city. For instance, 52 per cent of the respondents in Fagersta agree that they could have a dialogue with the politicians in the city before important decisions are taken, the average being 36 per cent. Also 60 per cent know to whom they should turn if they would like to participate in the development of the city. Here the average is 44 per cent and the lowest figure only 21 per cent.

It is also evident that the leadership is visible. Fagersta deviates from average cities in that the chairman of the executive committee gets more coverage in both city information material and media (Fagersta 2006: 10).

Participation seems to be higher than in the surrounding municipalities and the possibility of influencing decisions is also greater. Since Stig Henriksson represents a "normally" rather small party, his position depends on keeping the confidence of voters who would otherwise vote for another party. His dependence on voters, not a traditionally dominant party, presumably keeps him on his toes and encourages him to consult people and reach agreements across ideological borders.

To sum up, the leadership of Stig Henriksson seems to include all the elements mentioned in the introduction. He is quite visible both in mass media and in the local community. He pays a lot of attention to visions about the future and has the skills to communicate them. Consensus seeking is part of the strategy to the extent that he has been criticised of not acting according to a leftist agenda. By representing a normally insignificant party in local politics, he has managed to find support far above expectations. This would have been very hard to achieve, had he acted only in the interest of traditional party ideology.

5. Conclusions: uncomfortable perhaps, but still potential allies

Cities in the three countries used as examples all present a case for taking strong political leadership seriously. It is not a quick fix to all problems and we do not argue that individual cities could simply imitate successful ones in order to prosper. Interestingly enough though, individual leaders have made a difference in three so very different settings. Making a difference it is not a question of engineering. Even if structures are changed through new legislation, behaviour could still depend on cultural patterns developed over decades. Also, as in most changes perhaps, some people risk losing their powerful positions and prestige. We cannot expect them to be very enthusiastic about the prospects of change. A few general conclusions can be offered:

The crisis in local government could be described as mostly a crisis of parties, *not* local democracy in itself. When trying to reinvigorate local government, leadership should be seen as a potential ally, not as a rival. Of course, bosses and other similar kinds of "strong men" are not what local democracy needs. And, it is not wise to produce straw men either but to think of the potential in leaders who actually instil hope for a better future in people and engage them in a *common* vision. Some leaders seem to be able to overcome a general distrust in politics. In order to do so, these leaders will need to have an open style, be able to listen and consult. This

gives citizens a better chance of participating. Whether this would work everywhere is very uncertain, but as we have seen it *could* work.

Since efficiency has been more important than democracy in many of the reforms, political leadership has not developed alongside the new skills of managers. Strong political leadership seems necessary to counterbalance the often visionary and charismatic new managers who are in great demand otherwise the character of local democracy will alter and become even more dependent on professional administrators. Local political leaders could therefore act as a counterforce against the power of civil servants. However, there are certain risks involved. Strong leadership could result in a one man show or even a charismatic catastrophe (Bryman 1992). History is full of good examples of such leaders. That is why the rule-makers have some reasons for concern to ensure that power is not misused. Also questions of succession could be problematic when certain leaders are in the limelight all the time. There should also be a question of gender bias. Popular examples of successful leadership most often portray only men unfortunately.

Another concern is that ideological differences are downplayed when consensus becomes overly important. This is contrary to the fact that political assemblies have conflict as an organising principle. Different views should be represented and disagreement be articulated. The risk of making politics itself superfluous is evident. Nevertheless, our examples show that parties still are important actors in the game, that all differences do not disappear, and that you could agree on what to disagree about.

Why are ideas about local democracy and political leadership then relatively untouched by change whereas, at the same time, cities and municipalities in many ways have changed dramatically? The parliamentary chain of control, the notion of the prerogative of politicians in decision-making, gives legitimacy and presents a simple picture of how things should work. In many ways the picture is based on what used to be; small units with personal knowledge of details and a total absence of "wicked" problems. Political leaders now are more professional, a relative large number of people could make a living out of politics. But they are still amateurs when we compare with the education and leadership training facilities of local government managers. To strengthen the position of politicians does not seem to be a very controversial idea. What is controversial is whether they should be strengthened at a collective or an individual level.

Perhaps we seem to have presented a puzzling argument: strengthen the power of people by concentrating on one person! It seems to be a contradiction. But, strong

and active leadership does not necessarily mean that democracy suffers. On the contrary, we have showed some examples where local government thrives very much due to successful leadership. Although there might be good reasons for a suspicious attitude to linger on, we should not dismiss leadership as a means to overcome crisis and go from confrontation to cooperation in local politics.

Chapter seven

The Added Value of Intra-municipal Decentralisation: Comparing Bologna, Rotterdam, and Birmingham

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1. Introduction

Against the background of a largely urbanised European population and of amalgamation processes directed at increasing urban areas' competitiveness and efficiency in service delivery, local governments are facing the challenge of strengthening existing channels of interaction with their citizens and establishing novel ones (e.g. Bäck et al. 2005; Van Assche 2005; Norton 1994). Intra-municipal decentralisation (IMD) can be regarded as an appropriate strategy to bolster the interaction between local authorities and their citizens by making use of both participatory and representative models of decision-making.

The three cases discussed and analysed in the chapter – Bologna, Rotterdam, and Birmingham – represent some of the most innovative and interesting examples of IMD that have been introduced to Europe in recent years and shed light on some of the challenges and achievements. The cases have been selected with the aim of including different traditions of (local) government systems and, in this regard, taking into account the frameworks developed by a number of scholars (Page and Goldsmith 1987; Loughlin and Peters 1997; Norton 1997). The chapter is based on a multiple-case design and the cases have been selected with the aim of maximising learning and offering the potential for critical reflection (Yin 2003). By focusing on the experiences of Bologna, Rotterdam and Birmingham, the chapter explores the issue of how IMD strategies operate in practice and whether they have been able to effectively meet the objectives for which they were adopted.

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2. Defining Intra-Municipal Decentralisation

Intra-municipal decentralisation (IMD) is a particular combination of decentralisation and democratisation, directed at strengthening the interaction between a municipal council and its citizens, by establishing (political) institutions and service delivery functions at the sub-municipal level. IMD has emerged in Western Europe largely in the last half of the twentieth century (Van Assche 2005; Norton 1994).

There are several ways in which citizens are connected or have input in policy processes. IMD is one of the options. First, citizens are of course voters and elect their representatives, and, in most countries, the mayor (e.g. Norton 1994). But there are more ways in which citizens can influence policy-making and politics. These ways can be distinct in direct and indirect democratic measures (e.g. Hendriks 2010). In direct democratic efforts, citizens are involved directly, such as through citizens initiatives or referenda. Also 'interactive policy-making' is part of this category. Interactive policy-making is a form of participation that is defined as; "a government that involves citizens, non-governmental organisations, companies and/or other governments in an early stage of the policy-making with the intention to find a solution for problems that have been defined together" (Van de Peppel 2001: 34). This book contains a collection of such initiatives, which can take the form of working groups, round table gatherings, reflection boards, exhibitions, and interviews (Van de Peppel 2001: 35-36).

However, apart from focusing on establishing direct democratic measures, it is also possible to strengthen citizens' participation through indirect democracy. This means that citizens can be more closely or intensively connected to government practices if representative democracy is strengthened or broadened. When establishing new representative bodies on the sub-local level, IMD falls under the latter.

Increasing citizens' participation is one of the key aims of IMD, but more can be distinguished. Burns et al. (1994) for example, identify the following: improving services, strengthening local accountability, achieving distributional aims, encouraging political awareness, developing staff, and controlling costs. Van Assche (2005) mentions four reasons why a local authority may decide to decentralise some of its competences to a lower level: to address the problems of scale and reduce the distance with the inhabitants, increase responsiveness by tapping local knowledge, protect local identities, and promote effectiveness and efficiency by allocating decision-making authority to the most suitable levels of local authority. Similarly, according to Bäck et al. (2005) IMD should fulfil five criteria: provide some form of

authority within a defined territory, be responsible for a number of public tasks, take the form of a political decision-making body, be responsible for service provision, and be connected, but not completely independent to a local authority.

Based on these (minimal) criteria put forward by Bäck et al., and the earlier mentioned arguments for a municipality to decentralise some of its competences, it is possible to identify yardsticks to evaluate the effectiveness of IMD. The following can be considered key yardsticks to evaluate the effectiveness of IMD strategies, adding the comment that a minimal score on these yardsticks is a requirement to be considered to be referred to as IMD (based on: Burns et al. 1994; Bäck et al. 2005; Van Assche 2005):

1. *Localisation*
   Localisation implies the relocation of public services from a centralised to a more local level to increase physical accessibility.
2. *Multifunctionality and flexibility*
   Sub-municipal decentralisation should be characterised by taking responsibility for the delivery of a range of public services rather than a single public function and by more flexible forms of organisational management crossing departmental boundaries (e.g. multidisciplinary team working and matrix management).
3. *Devolved management and control over resources*
   Devolved responsibility for service provision and decision-making powers should be supported by (controlled by) among others, human, technical and financial resources.
4. *Decentralised political decision-making body and decentralised influence*
   A political decision-making body, either appointed by the municipal council or preferably elected by the citizens, should be in place which is able to exert an influence on decision-making processes at the municipal level.
5. *Public engagement*
   Adequate channels for citizens to influence and exercise direct control on decision-making processes at the local level should be established and nurtured.

In what follows, firstly, the chapter will shed light on the reasons for the implementation of IMD strategies, focusing on the particular local democratic issues at stake and how the specific forms of IMD adopted in the three cases under consideration

have been adequate responses to these issues. Secondly, it will analyse how the three cases measure up against the IMD yardsticks identified and whether there are lessons to be learned from the different experiences. To adequately address these issues, the analysis has been clustered around four themes that will guide the empirical descriptions: establishment of the districts, structure of the districts, districts relations with the centre, and districts relations with the citizens. The relationship between these themes and the yardsticks are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 7.1.Themes and yardsticks

Themes	**Yardsticks**
1. Establishment of the districts	Localisation
2. Structure of the districts	Multi-functionality and flexibility
	Devolved management and control over resources
3. District relations with the centre	Political decision-making body and decentralised influence
4. District relations with citizens	Public engagement

3. Establishment of the districts

Bologna

In 1963, the municipality of Bologna initiated what can be considered as the most innovative experiment of intra-municipal decentralisation in Italy (Nanetti and Leonardi 1975). The aim of this initiative was to improve the management of the municipality by decentralising certain functions to the neighbourhood level. The decentralised entities were the neighbourhood councils and the mayor's representative in each neighbourhood. From an electoral point of view, the system was characterised by indirect representation: councillors elected at municipal level elected neighbour-

hood councillors. From an administrative point of view, civil servants operating in the decentralised offices were municipal employees and were ultimately accountable to the centre. In practice, the approach adopted by Bologna in the 1960s implied only a limited transfer of power to the neighbourhood bodies who had in the main a consultative role.

In order to give citizens a direct input into decision-making and implementation processes, in the 1970s Bologna actively allocated to the neighbourhood councils an increasing share of decision-making functions, mainly in the form of participation in the four-year capital improvement programme, spatial planning, transport, community safety, management of educational facilities and culture and leisure activities (Nanetti and Leonardi 1975). New bylaws were adopted to limit the role of the municipal council in the formulation of policy frameworks, while transferring the implementation to the neighbourhood level. As part of the process of decentralisation, as from 1975 the composition of neighbourhood councils did not reflect the weight of political parties at the centre, but it reflected the election results in any particular neighbourhood for the municipal council. Institutional organs at neighbourhood level became the council and its president, who replaced the mayor's representative, was no longer appointed by the centre but elected from among the neighbourhood councils' members.

In 1976, the Italian parliament passed a bill to institutionalise municipal decentralisation as a new mode of local government based on devolved political and administrative powers and extensive citizen participation. After the first direct elections of neighbourhood councils in 1980, intra-municipal decentralisation lost its momentum and the focus shifted to the rationalisation of the system to be achieved through better allocation of tasks and responsibilities between the central and the neighbourhood levels. In 1985 Bologna adopted the current decentralised structure by merging the existing eighteen neighbourhood councils into nine.

In 1990, a new legislative framework established the principle that municipalities with a population over 100,000 inhabitants should institute decentralised neighbourhood councils, as organs of participation, consultation and administration of basic services and delegated functions. The decentralised neighbourhood councils should be elected by direct suffrage and the statute defines the electoral system (Vandelli 2004).

In recent years, the debate around intra-municipal decentralisation in Bologna has focused on the need to review and streamline the current organisational arrangements against the background of the planned establishment of a metropolitan-

level authority. Neighbourhood councils are strongly in favour of a substantial increase of their powers and competences that would transform them into powerful actors within a metropolitan-wide territorial governance system able to respond to the challenges of polycentric forms of planning. Within this governance framework, neighbourhood councils would progressively become 'municipal neighbourhoods' with competences similar to those of the current municipal council.

Rotterdam

In 1964, Dutch law made it possible to establish directly elected districts within municipal territory. Even though Rotterdam has a history of different forms of neighbourhood councils, mainly with advisory competences, the first directly elected districts with government competences were not established until 1973. The proponents of IMD argued that as a result, citizens would become more involved in local government affairs. Opponents argued that IMD would make the governing of Rotterdam more difficult, more expensive, and would take more time and personnel (Hakvoort 1980). The reason to nevertheless implement intra-municipal decentralisation in Rotterdam was threefold (Eikenbroek et al. 1988 in Scientific Council for Government Policy 1989): bringing the government closer to its citizens, promoting the participation of the municipality's inhabitants, and relieving the political and governmental municipal centre from detailed neighbourhood affairs.

According to the municipal executive, the entire Rotterdam government was based on a complementary government. The municipal executive and district executives as well as the municipal council and district councils had to maintain a working relationship on the basis of equality, as well as sharing similar goals. These notions of the municipal executive were considered a foundation to implement IMD in almost the entire municipality of Rotterdam in 1990. After this was applied, the discussion as to whether a system of directly elected municipal districts was desirable or not, more or less ended (for the time being) and the discussion about what competences the districts should receive intensified (VRD date unknown).

In the 1990s it appeared that the districts would almost turn into genuine Dutch municipalities, but this meant, according to opponents, a 'division of the city'. This plan, which also meant neighbouring municipalities should be part of a large 'Rotterdam City Province', was rejected by a citizens' referendum in 1995. In 2002, the newcomer Liveable Rotterdam emerged as the largest party after the 2002 municipal election. The party proclaimed itself to be a strong opponent of the district system. Consequently, during the municipal legislature of 2002-2006, the discussion about

the value of a system of directly elected districts became topical again. The executive presented the report; 'Rotterdam Organized Government,' which detailed the future of the Rotterdam government, including the district system. The districts regarded this report as a proposal to abolish the districts and they protested heavily. The municipal executive underestimated this fierce resistance and in the summer of 2005, it made a short announcement in the city council: 'the plan will be withdrawn'. This discussion also led to the districts presenting a report together, namely: 'The value of Rotterdam local government'. In this report the districts amplified contacts with citizens as one of their major strong points, as well as their low barrier and their intermediate function between (central) city and citizens. Districts are able to provide tailor-made work more directed at what citizens want. Therefore, strong districts are essential, but this requires that the power to act within districts should be enforced (VRD 2005).

Birmingham

The Labour Party held power in Birmingham for twenty years, between 1984 and 2004. The manifesto on which it was elected in 1984 included commitments to a network of 'neighbourhood offices' in localities, especially in the most deprived areas, from which local council services would be delivered, and to (political) Area Sub-Committees for each parliamentary constituency. The aim of the neighbourhood offices was to provide access points for the whole range of council services. A network of offices was created, in locations convenient for council tenants and in inner city areas where the council was investing large sums of money in the repair and modernisation of owner-occupied housing.

The aim of the Area Sub-Committees was to enhance political accountability and responsiveness, and to bring decision-making nearer the people. But since they only met a few times each year, attended mainly by local political activists, and were used as a platform for political point-scoring against the majority party by the opposition, they were not very effective. In 1990, the Area Sub-Committees were replaced by Ward Sub-Committees, which focussed on more local issues, and were less political battlegrounds; but their performance was still patchy, working well when there was effective local leadership.

In 1997, the Ward Sub-Committees were strengthened with the addition of Ward Advisory Boards of up to 20 leading individuals from the local community and agencies working in it (such as the police, schools, the youth service, and relevant parts of the voluntary sector). Each Ward Sub-Committee was given the sup-

port, part-time in addition to existing duties, of a senior council official. They were then given a budget of £50,000 (€64,000) per ward per year, and clear procedures to allocate it (Coulson and Sullivan 2000).

In 2002, there was agreement in principle for devolution of financial and administrative responsibility for important mainstream services. This, however, was done to constituency rather than ward level – which meant that from May 2004 Birmingham had two tiers of area committees – the Ward Committees which continued to exist and lobby for their local areas, and the Constituency (or District) Committees. Initially there were 11 of these, but in 2006, following minor boundary changes, the number was reduced to 10.

During its second year of operation, the Birmingham decentralisation was the subject of a comprehensive 'overview and scrutiny' investigation.[42] It concluded in broad terms that the decentralisation was a success, associated it with improved perceptions of the city by its inhabitants, and proposed means by which the process could be taken further (Birmingham City Council 2006).

4. Current structure of the districts

Bologna

The decentralised political and administrative structure of the municipality of Bologna consists of nine neighbourhood councils with a population of between 24,000 and 64,000. The functioning of the neighbourhood councils is regulated by the statute of the municipality and by the regulation on intra-municipal decentralisation.

Citizens in conjunction with the municipal elections elect neighbourhood councils. The number of neighbourhood councillors depends on the number of inhabitants, ranging from fifteen to twenty. The neighbourhood council elects the president. The president appoints his cabinet ('Ufficio di Presidenza'), which consists of the vice-president, the co-ordinators of the different political groups in the neighbourhood council, and the co-ordinators of the commissions ('Commissioni di

42 The new arrangements for local government in England, introduced in the Local Government Act 2000, are best known for their requirement for all but the smallest councils to have small executives or directly elected mayors. What is less well known is that they were also required to institute 'overview and scrutiny committees', where councillors who are not part of the executive could conduct investigations into council policy. The overview and scrutiny function in Birmingham is by far the best resourced, and one of the most productive, of any in England.

Lavoro'). The cabinet has the task of planning the agenda of the neighbourhood council and of co-ordinating the activities of the commissions.

Neighbourhood councils have decision-making power concerning the activities and the management of the services under their control. This power must be exercised in accordance with the overall framework, principles and policies set by the municipal council. Within their territory, neighbourhood councils co-ordinate the activities of all public agencies involved in the delivery of decentralised public services. According to the statute of Bologna, neighbourhood councils have specific competencies in relation to the provision of social services for the elderly and of support to civil society associations, and to the management of educational, culture and leisure facilities. Increasingly, neighbourhood councils play a role regarding public safety and quality of life. In this respect, neighbourhood councils can adopt specific regeneration initiatives tailored to the local circumstances and directed at increasing public safety.

In each neighbourhood a director has the overall responsibility for the decentralised administration and for the management of the neighbourhood services, offices and staff, in line with the guidelines and criteria established by the neighbourhood council. Each neighbourhood has on average 50 civil servants. The director coordinates the services delivered at the neighbourhood level, monitors service quality, and makes proposals for their improvement, which are also on the basis of citizen consultation and participation processes.

Each year the municipal council quantifies the financial resources (approximately €34 million in 2007, less than 7% of the overall municipal budget) to be transferred to the neighbourhoods to enable them to carry out the devolved functions. The amount received by each neighbourhood is proportional to the population and the size of the territory, and depends on the number of services provided and on a range of socio-economic indicators. The neighbourhood councils draw up annual plans ('programmi obiettivo') in which it is outlined in detail how the available budget will be spent. The annual plans are prepared before the municipal budget and are submitted to the municipal council which verifies their conformity to the overall goals and objectives of the municipality, according to a procedure defined by the council regulation.

Rotterdam

In Rotterdam each of the districts has a directly elected district council and a district executive. District councils consist of 13 to 25 members, depending on the number

of inhabitants. Just as with ‘central’ level, a coalition is formed that (generally) consists of a majority in the district council (‘districtsraad’). The coalition chooses the district executives (‘dagelijks bestuur’), the district aldermen and the district chairman. The district chairman heads the district executives and the district council.

The municipal council, municipal executives and the mayor determine which competences they transfer to the district council, the district executives, and the district chairman, respectively. The municipal council, municipal executives, and mayor can also take competences back from the districts, and when they consider it in the interest of the city, they can overrule the districts.

An important difference with municipalities is that districts are only competent for what explicitly is given to them. In the case of Rotterdam, these competences are summed up in the District Ordinance. In general, it is regarded that the competences of the Rotterdam districts are relatively small (Derksen and Schaap 2004: 222). A district has competences in the areas of general government (provision of licenses, upholding regulations, infrastructural plans, participation of citizens, maintenance of environmental plans), public order and safety (opening times of bars and restaurants, gambling, protection of animals, upholding of city regulations), traffic, transportation and water works (reconstruction of streets, bridges, parks, squares and other public places), economics (public markets, opening hours shops), education (setting priorities for educational activities for social activation and learning Dutch as a second language), culture and recreation (general policy, maintenance of sport facilities), social services and societal support (general policy, welfare provision), public health (environmental and environment), and infrastructure and housing (provision of licenses, reconstruction). To accomplish all of these tasks, a district has it own staff, but most of the time this is not that large (around forty/fifty people on average).

Districts receive money from the municipal executive. About 90% of this comes from the General District Fund, which donates the money to enable districts to perform tasks assigned to them by the District Ordinance. The way the money is divided was altered in 2003. The money is divided among the districts according to a number of requirements, such as, the size of the district, the number of inhabitants, the amount of public space, et cetera. The budget that is awarded is about €260 million. This is not a lot compared to the total expenses of Rotterdam (€4.5 billion), but constitutes approximately 25% of the money Rotterdam receives from the General Municipal Fund and property taxes. In addition to money from the General District Fund, the districts can also receive smaller specific grants for specific tasks.

Birmingham
There are ten constituencies in the city, each with a constituency director (at assistant director level within the city administrative hierarchy). Each constituency contains four electoral wards each with three elected councillors. The constituencies took over staff from the Leisure Services Department, the Neighbourhood Offices, community development, and the Ward Support Officers, and direct responsibilities for local parks, leisure facilities, local libraries and arts projects, adult education, and community facilities. They hold the budgets for refuse collection from households, street cleaning, road maintenance, and the management of sports and leisure facilities, even though these are the subject of centrally let contracts; the constituencies can negotiate 'service level agreements' under which the details of the provision can be varied for a particular constituency, subject to not spending additional resources. They were also expected to have a very strong influence on housing management, which itself has been the subject of numerous decentralisation initiatives over the years, though the details of this have not been specified. In total, £100m (€125m) and 2,500 staff were 'lifted and shifted' from the centre to the constituencies (Birmingham City Council 2007).

5. District relations with the centre

Bologna
In order to exert influence on decision-making processes at the municipal level, neighbourhood councils can use three different instruments: power of initiative ('potere di iniziativa'), enquiries ('interrogazioni'), and opinions ('pareri').

Through the power of initiative, neighbourhood councils can formulate proposals directed at shaping the future direction and choices of the municipal council. Neighbourhood councils can submit enquiries to the mayor concerning decisions adopted at the centre, to which the mayor has to respond to within thirty days. In order to guarantee the full involvement of neighbourhood councils in the decisions of the municipal council and to stimulate the adoption of innovative approaches, the mayor and the aldermen are obliged to ask the neighbourhood councils' opinion on general matters concerning the organisation and functioning of the decentralised structure and on issues related to planning, transport, and local economic development, when these have a direct relevance at the neighbourhood level. In case the

municipal council rejects the proposals or opinions formulated by the neighbourhood councils, it has to motivate its decision.

The Conference of the Neighbourhood Councils' Presidents is the formal co-ordination body between the neighbourhoods and the municipality. It convenes once a week, is chaired by one of the neighbourhood councils' presidents on a rotating basis, and sees the participation of the relevant – central city – aldermen. Its aim is to facilitate the exchange of information and the co-ordination of activities between the centre and the decentralised structure. The Conference may decide to submit an enquiry to the mayor, to authorise its chairpersons to attend the municipal council's meetings when it deals with issues of particular interest for the neighbourhoods, to arrange a meeting with the mayor, to advise the executive or individual aldermen on themes of common interest, and to question service directors at municipal level. The mayor and the aldermen may request the Conference to express opinions on matters concerning more than just the neighbourhood or the totality of the municipal area.

Despite these formal instruments that are utilised to exert influence on the decision-making processes at the centre, the view that neighbourhood councils have only a limited way to make their voice heard and acted upon is widespread among the stakeholders involved. Their function appears to be essentially consultative: ensuring the exchange of information, shedding light on local priorities, and facilitating co-ordination.

Rotterdam

The district councils and municipal council govern the city together. Cooperation in practice can sometimes nevertheless be difficult. The relationship between the districts and the (central) municipality is written down in the District Ordinance. Consultation between municipal government and district government is maintained on the basis of equality. The district chairmen meet in the Chairmen Committee which acts as a pre-meeting to the Mayor Committee Meeting, which is a formal meeting with the mayor and a few district chairmen.

Both municipal government and district government inform each other about their decisions and policy implementations nevertheless, the municipality has a dominant position.

When 'city interests' are at stake, the municipal council, the executive, or the mayor can withdraw competences from the district council, district executive, or district chairman and are able to suspend its decisions for a maximum period of one

year. The municipal government can also withdraw competences if the municipality's cooperation is required for the implementation of policy from higher authorities, provinces or state. Furthermore, the municipal executive can suspend any decision of the district executive if they consider it against the 'common interest'.

Birmingham

Formerly, each Constituency Committee is an area committee of the city council, with decision-making powers, and control over the budget delegated to it by the city council. In reality the structures are more complex. Table 2 below shows three levels of local decision-making, each shadowed by a partnership body, comprised of its principal stakeholders. In each case the representative body shown is endeavouring to co-ordinate decision-making and policies, with varying degrees of success.

Table 7.2.Multi-level governance in Birmingham

Administrative level	Representative structure	Stakeholder structure
Local authority	City Council	City Strategic Partnership
Constituency (10)	Constituency Committee	District Strategic Partnership
Ward (40)	Ward Committee	Ward Advisory Board

The Constituency (or District) Strategic Partnerships are non-executive bodies, reporting back to their parent bodies, such as the Council or the police or the Primary Care Trust (which holds many of the local budgets for the National Health Service). How effective they are depends on a politics of influence – and in particular on their chairs. But at best they can expect to influence at the margin when it comes to strategic decision-making, or else at the point of implementation when contact with local agencies may become an urgent necessity. The Constituency Committees also report to a member of the Council Executive, the Executive Member for Local Services.

6. District relations with citizens

Bologna

One of the key functions of the decentralised structure is to promote public participation. At the neighbourhood level there are many formal and informal channels of public consultation and participation. The so-called council commissions ('Commmissioni Consiliari') represent the most relevant participatory channel.

The council commissions are consultative organs established by the neighbourhood council and deal with specific issues such as territorial planning, environment, local economic development, social policy and education. They gather information, discuss, deliberate, and inform and influence the activity of neighbourhood councils. Council commissions are co-ordinated by a neighbourhood councillor and are made up of citizens who apply to become members. The only compulsory council commission deals with budgeting, planning and institutional affairs. It is comprised of the president, vice-president, co-ordinators of party groups and co-ordinators of the council commissions, and it mirrors a commission with the same function at municipal level to strengthen co-ordination. The president can request council commissions to deliberate and express an opinion on a particular issue relevant to the neighbourhood. In their activity, the offices and staff of the neighbourhood support council commissions.

It is important to stress that council commissions do not have real decision-making powers and their proposals have to be approved of by the neighbourhood council. Nevertheless, neighbourhood councillors and citizens regard them as a very effective instrument making the voice of the neighbourhood clearly audible at municipal level. It should also be noted that there is a tendency for council commissions to deliberate and issue proposals also on subject matter to which they are not formally entitled.

Besides the council commissions, which represent a formal way of fostering public involvement, the neighbourhoods promote and nurture more informal channels of consultation and participation such as informal meetings, public debates, community events, open access to neighbourhood facilities, support to civil society organisations and associations. These contribute to reinforcing the cultural identity of the neighbourhoods and the feeling of belonging among the inhabitants.

The Citizen One-Stop-Shop represents the interface between the neighbourhood and the local inhabitants and constitutes the first port of call for all citizens to get information on the services provided at the neighbourhood level. It is under-

pinned by the idea of providing more joined-up services and to substantially increase the accessibility of council services at the lowest possible level. The Citizen One-Stop-Shop provides information on the activities of the neighbourhood, promotes an ongoing dialogue with public service users and the wider population, collects suggestions and complaints, and fosters citizen participation in its broadest sense.

Rotterdam
One of the reasons for Rotterdam intra-municipal decentralisation is to make government not so distant from its citizens. The District Ordinance deals with this. Many of the articles address the relationship the district tries to maintain with the neighbourhood organisations, which are in many ways the frontrunners of the intra-municipal system of directly elected districts. Some neighbourhood organisations consider themselves as the official representatives of the neighbourhood; there are numerous articles in the District Ordinance that focus on this topic.

Article 9 of the District Ordinance obligates the district council to inform the neighbourhood organisations about any plans regarding their neighbourhood. The article also states that the district council should finance their organisation, which means that in every neighbourhood at least one neighbourhood organisation is officially recognised (in practice, often more exist).

On a more general citizens' level, a district chairman has important competences regarding the field of participation of citizens in policy-making. These tasks include (article 50):

- The quality of the procedures regarding citizens' participation.
- A careful treatment of citizens' objections (a legal way to fight policy decisions).
- A careful treatment of citizens' complaints.

Like the mayor, a district chairman has to publish a; 'Citizens Year Rapport,' once a year evaluating the state of affairs regarding contacts between citizens and the district government, be it complaints, or different forms of participation in policy-making and policy implementation.

Apart from the legal assignment, the districts also believe strongly in establishing close relationships with citizens. The dilemma is that they do not have the competences to fulfil expectations that normally can be expected from a Dutch munici-

pal government. Research regarding the tasks of districts has shown that even though the competences may be written down, tasks belonging to the competences are less clear. This leads to confusion and to a situation where the districts cannot make a big difference towards their citizens because they lack the ability to act, which makes the distance between city government and citizens even greater, just the opposite of the initial goal of intra-municipal decentralisation (Derksen and Korsten 1985: 95).

"City districts should put much more effort into establishing and maintaining the contact with citizens" (Tops and Van Ostaaijen 2006). A lot of energy in the districts nevertheless focuses on the relationship with City Hall. Since the position of the districts is constantly being debated, their position is weak and they have to put a lot of energy into maintaining their position. In practice, city districts tend to develop a fondness for policy-making, even though districts are strong in working with citizens. On account of the legal constraints (few competences and financial limits) and political debate (the districts always work in the shadow of the discussion as to whether or not to abolish the intra-municipal decentralisation system) the city districts have one of the most difficult tasks in city politics namely establishing and maintaining the contact with citizens, but due to their relative size and closeness to the citizens, they are well suited for the job.

Birmingham

Birmingham is unique in England in having interlocking area committees at both the ward and constituency level. The system gives citizens two opportunities formally to present their views to councillors and council officials. Whether it gives the citizens real influence is another matter. The present debate in the city, and indeed in the UK as a whole, is more about service delivery and efficiency than about being close to the people either as a means to that end or as an end in itself.

This runs alongside another debate about whether the ward is the correct unit for community activity, or whether it is too big. We have already noted that the Birmingham wards are artificial structures. The public think of themselves as belonging to suburbs, or estates, or other areas of the city smaller than the present wards. There is therefore a case for community development on a smaller scale – described in Birmingham as a 'neighbourhood', with at least three or four neighbourhoods in a ward. At various times, 'neighbourhood forums' have been promoted.

However, neighbourhood forums have often proved highly critical of the city council, especially in situations where large sums of central government money are being spent. Since they do not have formal elections by universal franchise, there are doubts about their legitimacy (and cases when they have been taken over by one racial group or a clique of friends). In a racial and political situation as volatile as that of Birmingham, it is doubtful if they can provide a firm foundation for decentralisation, though they undoubtedly give a platform to some very determined community activists.

The constituency committees in Birmingham get their resources from the city council, which makes them highly subservient to it, vulnerable to cuts, and lacking discretion about tax levels. All they can do is to move the given resources around. However, there is a degree of separation: thus councillors at ward or district committees will criticise the city council for neglecting their area, even though it is run by the same political party. Their position would be strengthened if they had direct control over money for regeneration or to combat disadvantage – but so far the centre has argued that there would be a loss of efficiency if this happened, and been very reluctant to let go.

7. Conclusions

Using the yardsticks identified at the outset (establishment of the districts, structure of the districts, districts relations with the centre, and districts relations with the citizens), the following conclusions can be drawn from the empirical analysis of the experiences of Bologna, Rotterdam and Birmingham with intra-municipal decentralisation.

Bologna and Rotterdam are among the first local authorities in Western Europe to have adopted an IMD strategy. In Birmingham, IMD has long been at the forefront of the political agenda but has only recently been implemented. In all three cases the decisions resulted from discussions at the local and national level on how to strengthen local democracy. The implementation of IMD strategies has been characterised by the interplay between bottom-up demands and top-down interventions in the forms of national laws and regulations. The central rationale for implementing IMD in all three cases is unequivocal: bring government and administration at the local level closer to the citizens, by increasing physical accessibility to public services and promoting forms of participatory democracy.

The districts in all three local authorities are generally responsible for the provision of a range of public services (e.g., registry offices, social services for the elderly, management of leisure facilities, dissemination of information) and also have (limited) policy and implementation tasks. The localisation of these public services undoubtedly increases the physical accessibility. In certain cases, the decentralised structure of the districts facilitates more flexible organisational forms that cross departmental boundaries. In Bologna and Rotterdam the districts constitute relatively small organisations with a limited number of civil servants who are only in charge of a small portion of the overall budget. In Birmingham, the districts are larger organisations with a more substantive number of civil servants. In all three cases, district resources are in practice provided by the central municipality. The districts are also highly dependent on centrally-led municipal service departments for the implementation of their tasks.

District councillors are either directly elected, as in Bologna and Rotterdam, or appointed by the municipal council as in Birmingham. In all three cases, the central municipality has decentralised competences, tasks, and budgets for the districts. However, the influence of the districts is only marginal when it comes to strategic decision-making. By way of illustration, in Rotterdam the centre can overrule decentralised decisions when these are considered as not being in line with the general municipal interest. The autonomy of the districts is therefore limited and this creates tensions concerning the optimal distribution of decision-making powers between the two levels. Lack of trust may also be regarded as a factor negatively affecting the relation between the centre and the districts. Complex institutional arrangements such as in Birmingham, with the presence of multiple layers of local government, may cause further difficulties. In Bologna, by contrast, due to its tradition of effective and efficient public management and its fairly homogeneous political culture, the relationship between the centre and the neighbourhoods is not characterised by unclear division of competences or divisive conflict. However, as is often the case, neighbourhoods have been demanding a more drastic transfer of powers and financial resources from the centre and their progressive transformation into ‘municipal neighbourhoods’ with competences similar to those of the current municipality. This transition has so far been stifled by the lack of progress in Italy on the debate concerning the establishment of metropolitan areas.

Strengthening the relationship with citizens is one of the key goals of IMD strategies in all three cases. In this respect, formal and informal channels of engagement to gather citizens’ perceptions and preferences have been introduced or

strengthened. However, the limited decision-making powers of the districts have a negative impact on their capacity to effectively accomplish this role as citizens' expectations cannot always be met. The districts seem to be able to ensure access to, but only limited influence on decision-making processes. The provision of adequate channels of engagement such as council commissions in Bologna does not always translate into direct control over decision-making. In Rotterdam the districts sometimes appear to be more concerned about safeguarding their position vis-à-vis the centre rather than mediate between this and the demands of the citizenry. There is an issue of scale and local identity in Birmingham and the question is whether some people participating reflect the larger neighbourhood population.

To conclude, Table 3 below summarises the findings by showing how each case under consideration measures up against the four key yardsticks.

Table 7.3.The IMD yardsticks applied to the three cases

+ = poor + + + + + + = very good	Bologna	Rotterdam	Birmingham
Establishment of the districts			
Localisation	+ + +	+ + +	+ +
Structure of the districts			
Multifunctionality and flexibility	+ + +	+ + +	+ + +
Devolved management and control over resources	+ +	+ +	+ + +
Relationship with the centre			
Political decision-making body	+ + + +	+ + + +	+ +
Decentralised influence	+	+ +	+ +
Relationship with citizens			
Public engagement	+ +	+ +	+ +

Chapter eight

Regionalisation and the Democratic Legitimacy of Local Governments

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1. Introduction and central question

Throughout Europe, local authorities are facing face problems of scale. Municipalities have various tasks, such as the delivery of services and local policymaking. In addition, they represent local society at other levels of government. The size of local authorities is unsuitable for many of these tasks because they are sometimes too small and sometimes they are too big. Many local issues demand answers at the regional level. Therefore, in many cases, policymaking is not the exclusive responsibility of single local governments.

European countries have applied different strategies to solve these problems of scale. This chapter will focus on those strategies where an enlargement of scale is the main element; that is, where the solution to the problem to a local government scale that is perceived to be too small lies in regional governance. Some countries have decided to create new layers of government at the regional level, others have improved intermunicipal cooperation. Decisions must then be made by regional authorities or in intergovernmental networks.

We assume that in both scenarios the democratic legitimacy of local authorities will be affected. Do local authorities lose legitimacy or, quite paradoxically, is their legitimacy enhanced? This is the puzzle to be addressed in this chapter. We will discuss the concept of 'democratic legitimacy' in section 3. One of 'democratic legitimacy' meanings is governments' ability to respond to societal needs and demands (hence, responsiveness). On the one hand, regionalisation often means a transfer of local responsibilities to a regional level of government (whether this is

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either an autonomous or an intermunicipal body). This may result in diminished legitimacy, since local authorities lose some of their capabilities with which to respond to local needs and demands. This effect will probably be stronger when a regional tier of government is created. The other form is intermunicipal cooperation which may still grant municipalities a say in regional policies. On the other hand, we may hypothesise that the legitimacy of local government is enhanced by regionalisation. Regionalisation may relieve local authorities of the burden of addressing societal needs which they are unable to fulfil. As a result, the relation between societal expectations and local government powers may become less asymmetrical. In addition, intermunicipal cooperation may enhance the legitimacy of each cooperating authority, since they combine their respective powers and thus increase their capacity to solve problems.

Little is known, however, about the empirical effects of regionalisation on the democratic legitimacy of local government. Many scholars have published work addressing subjects such as governance and network management as alternative models to the ones of 'government' (Rhodes 1997; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997; John 2001; Bekkers et al. 2007; Sørensen and Torfing 2007). Others have published volumes on urban or metropolitan governance (for instance, Haus, Heinelt and Stewart 2005; Heinelt and Kübler 2005; Hendriks, Van Stipdonk and Tops 2005; Andersen and Pierre 2010). Several of the latter cover international, comparative aspects and provide country-by-country comparisons. They present relevant information and insights into developments in each separate country, but are less useful when it comes to analysing the effects of specific policies, such as the creation of regional tiers of government. Comparative evaluations from a thematic point of view may fill that gap. That is what this chapter is about: the comparison of different kinds of regional governance arrangements in a number of western European countries.

In this chapter we therefore attempt to answer the following questions:

A. What are the ways in which intermunicipal cooperation affects the democratic legitimacy of local governance?
B. What are the ways in which the creation of a regional tier of government affects the democratic legitimacy of local and regional governance?

In order to answer these focal questions, the authors compared four cases of regional governance.[43] In the next section, we discuss the concept of regional governance. A distinction between two strategies of regional governance, 'consolidation' and 'new regionalism', will be introduced. In section 3, the authors will briefly address the issue of democratic legitimacy and discuss the selection of cases. In sections 4 and 5 the cases are described and analysed in terms of aspects of legitimacy. In section 6, we draw our conclusions.

2. Regional governance

Various modes and strategies of governance at a regional level are found in the literature (cf. Heinelt and Kübler 2005). In this chapter, the two models we will discuss, 'consolidation' and 'new regionalism', are called 'regional government' and 'intermunicipal cooperation', respectively.

In the regional government strategy, policymaking has to be carried out by a single regional governmental body; institutional boundaries are considered to be obstacles to effective policymaking. In this strategy, the creation of a new tier of regional government or the strengthening of an existing one is considered to be the answer to problems of scale. The regional government is expected to function as the exclusive authority at the regional level, by deciding on regional policies and executing them. For that purpose the regional government will have exclusive capacities and sufficient financial means. This strategy can easily be linked to a general approach to the study of public administration being the government approach (John 2001: 17; Schaap 2005). It emphasises the necessity for clear distinctions between the levels of government in a hierarchical and consolidated structure, and is combined with direct central government control. In addition to this, a clear division of tasks between governmental levels is thought to be essential, and capacities and authorities should be as exclusive as possible.

The other strategy, intermunicipal cooperation, supports the idea that cooperation between authorities and other actors will stabilise policymaking and thus ensure effective policies. Existing local or functional government bodies continue to exist, although the way they function may be subject to discussion and change. Safeguard-

43 The authors previously published the results of an exploration of these regional cases; see Ruano and Schaap 2007.

ing cooperation and preventing 'free rider' behaviour are important in this strategy. Whereas regional government is based on the government approach, intermunicipal cooperation has strong theoretical ties to the 'governance' approach[44] (John 2001: 17; Schaap 2005) and concepts such as policy network management (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997; Rhodes 1997).[45] Those approaches also focus on cooperation between government actors and between government and non-governmental actors. The governance approach recognises that problems are centred around the difficulty municipalities have in cooperating with each other, the possible inflexibility of the present division of tasks, the existence of veto power on the part of some actors, and the existence of somewhat closed frames of reference (cf. Schaap and Van Twist 1997; Schaap 2007).

3. Case selection and legitimacy

The focal questions address the issue of democratic legitimacy in cases of regionalisation.

Differences in state traditions have been taken into account in the selection of cases. Loughlin and Peters (1997) suggest that four state traditions can be distinguished in Europe: Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, French/Napoleonic and Scandinavian. Norton (1994) describes three European state traditions (besides a North American and a Japanese tradition): South European, North European, and the British tradition. Countries largely belong to one tradition, but may share features with others. Different state traditions, among other characteristics, have different kinds of decentralisation and sub-national governments (although a recent study seems to suggest that state traditions lose relevance; cf. Goldsmith and Page 2010). The case selection respected the various distinctions in state traditions. A final criterion was that the cases showed the results of recent reforms.

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44 Please note that we use 'governance' in two ways. First of all, it is a generic term, meaning the act of governing. The second use of the term is a specific one, in which 'governance' refers to a specific kind of governing.

45 There may, however, be some differences between the two approaches, according to John (2001: 17). Whereas many network approaches focus on intergovernmental relations, governance approaches mainly deal with flexible relations between governmental and non-governmental actors.

In this study the authors selected:

- A southern European case of intermunicipal co-operation: intermunicipal cooperation near Madrid. A number of small cities in the region near Madrid collaborate with each other in order to design and implement social policies by creating municipal associations.
- A Germanic case of intermunicipal cooperation: Hanover. The cities neighbouring Hanover have implemented a policy of cooperation that has profoundly changed the organisational and functional structure of the regional and local governments in part of Lower Saxony.
- An Anglo-Saxon case of regional government: spatial planning in Greater London. The Greater London Authority bears the responsibility for several regional policy fields, mainly connected to spatial development, transport, planning, and the environment.
- A Scandinavian case of regional government: spatial planning in the greater Copenhagen region, where the Greater Copenhagen Authority was responsible for regional spatial planning and transport (it ceased to exist on January 1st 2007).

The cases are not as ‘pure’ as one might expect. Copenhagen and Hanover especially bear elements of both regional government and intermunicipal cooperation. The regional arrangements in Copenhagen, in particular, are a combination of a regional tier of government with its own jurisdiction that is however, organised as an intergovernmental authority. Most regional governance in this study is about regional policymaking, whereas the intermunicipal cooperation in the Madrid area mainly deals with the delivery of services. The Madrid case of cooperating municipalities may appear to be a pure one, but it must be noted that there is a regional tier of government in the Madrid area called the Autonomous Community of Madrid.

We used an international comparative case study approach (see Korsten et al. 1995). We selected a small number of cases we believed to be theoretically relevant because the cases responded to models of organisation that defy the traditional staunch configuration of territorial layers of government by setting up novel forms of regional governance (either intermunicipal cooperation or regional government). New forms of regional governance require legitimisation in non-traditional ways. The traditional mechanisms of the existing local representative democracy no longer suffice because regional bodies have come into existence. Within the population of

regional bodies we have tried to select cases that collectively represent the diversity of cases within that population (see Gerring 2007: 97-99). We have selected 'pure' cases of intermunicipal cooperation and of regional government as well as cases that represent more hybrid forms of regional governance, to cover the range of existing regional governance models. By studying these cases we gain additional insight into the relationship between (new) institutional structures and the legitimacy of local government. The current study develops hypotheses with regard to the relation between the structure of regional governance on the one hand, and legitimacy on the other. We aim at mapping the relevant characteristics of the forms of government under study in relation to legitimacy in considerable detail, which requires in-depth description. For that reason, we have opted for an approach that is case-oriented in nature, rather than variable-oriented (see Ragin 1987).

The main question of this research is whether regionalisation affects the democratic input and throughput legitimacy of local authorities. This focal question differs somewhat from those formulated in other chapters, because in most of the cases analysed in this volume there is a rather one-dimensional relation between perceived problems, applied strategies and implemented projects, and democratic legitimacy. Projects are targeted at solving problems of democracy. In this chapter, however, we deal with a rather autonomous development in public administration, i.e. regionalisation, and analyse the consequences that development has for (local) democracy. This development arguably is not neutral in its affects on local democratic legitimacy. Legitimacy, at least as far as accountability is concerned, traditionally means that citizens as voters may hold their administrators to account (cf. Aarsaether et al. 2009). In order to do so, the main condition is that citizens need to be able to identify the administrators which is quite difficult in multi-level settings. In such settings, for instance, in intermunicipal co-operations, a directly elected council is absent and voters do not have a direct link to their administrators nor representatives. Legitimacy is *indirect and borrowed* (Bekkers and Edwards 2007: 46). The question whether intermunicipal decisions are legitimate is not answered at the same level, but at the level of the co-operating partners.

Other volumes provide extensive discussions on 'legitimacy'. We refrain from repeating these discussions and gratefully base our legitimacy concept on the overview Bekkers and Edwards made some years ago (2007: 43ff). They endorsed and elaborated upon Scharpf's (1998), distinction between input and output legitimacy, and discussed input, throughput and output legitimacy (see also Haus and Heinelt 2005). Following these contributions, we applied this distinction in our study. We

chose to leave out output legitimacy, partly since this volume focusses on government by and of the people and less on government for the people, partly since in multi-level governance input and throughput legitimacy in particular may be endangered (Bekkers and Edwards 2007: 47).

All four cases will be described in terms of the following questions:

1. What is the case about and, what kind of governance arrangement are we describing: is it an intermunicipal structure, or a regional level of government? What is the basic issue? Which actors cooperate, and in what sense? Which actors are otherwise involved, and in what roles? Which actors make the final decisions?
2. What is the extent of input legitimacy: (a) which opportunities for participation exist (voting or others), (b) what is the quality of representation of societal interests and preferences, and (c) to what extent is the agenda open to popular wishes and concerns?
3. What is the extent of throughput legitimacy: (a) how are decisions being made and is decision-making aggregative or integrative, (b) what quality does the participation have, to what extent are elected representatives involved, and is citizen participation based on identity and interests, or on expertise, and (c) what is the quality of the checks and balances in order to protect weak interests and/or groups?
4. Did the regionalisation of governance result in changes to the input and/or throughput legitimacy of the local authorities concerned?

Of course, the authors of this chapter do not ignore the possible influence of other factors on the legitimacy of the existing local governments and of the new institutions (e.g. physical and psychological distance, citizens and governments, performance, lack of information about the way they work), but consider *democratic* legitimacy to depend in large part, on the existence of accepted mechanisms to enhance direct or indirect citizen participation in policymaking and of instruments of political control over the executives.

Several methods were used for data collection. First, written sources about all the cases were analysed. Second, the authors held in depth-interviews with civil servants working for the authorities involved in the Madrid and Hanover cases. For the London case, officers of the Greater London Authority, London Council as well

as two boroughs (Harrow and Haringey) answered a detailed questionnaire. Finally, the Copenhagen study is based on a questionnaire and on interviews. The questionnaire was answered by three respondents, including the Hovedstadens Udviklingsråd as a whole plus its president. In addition, the authors interviewed two officers of the Municipality of Copenhagen and three officers provided additional information on the position of the mayor, national structural reform and on Kvarterplaner.

4. Intermunicipal cooperation practices

4.1 Madrid: municipal associations as management organisations

A first glance at the Spanish territorial structure reveals the weakness of the local authorities. Most of them are too small in terms of geographic size and population to efficiently deliver the main public services provided by the welfare state. Most Spanish municipalities (60.4 per cent) have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, and 85.8 per cent have fewer than 5,000. This structural condition has led to a concentration of the capacity for delivering public services within the regions (*comunidades autónomas*), through a long process of decentralisation from the State. Nevertheless, municipalities have retained the power to intervene in any matter that is considered to be of interest to the local community. In this sense, it is customary for medium and small authorities to collaborate with other authorities to deliver compulsory services or participate complementarily in services for which they are not formally in charge (for example, education, health care, economic development). Associations of municipalities (*mancomunidades de municipios*) are voluntarily created to manage services that local authorities could not efficiently manage on their own; 74.4 per cent of Spanish municipalities belong to some of these intermunicipal structures.

The intermunicipal association known as ‘The Ilex’ is an example of this type of community. The Ilex consists of four municipalities that are located in the western Madrid region: these municipalities have a combined population of nearly 40,000. The statute that regulates this association specifies its name, territory, objectives, and way of functioning, as well as economic and budgetary conditions, and the governmental and representative organs that are intended to represent all the

associated municipalities. 'The Ilex' was created to allow the joint delivery of social services.

The general aim of the association is to develop comprehensive programmes for prevention and intervention and to collect and dispense information concerning the needs and social resources of the municipalities in this domain. The intermunicipal association must therefore strive to complement a public service it is not in charge of, instead of this being done by the regional government. As opposed to the Spanish municipalities that can act in any sector, these structures of cooperation are bound to the strict exercise of the competences contained in their statutes. The gap between the municipalities and the intermunicipal structure is founded in unstable balances and a weak administrative structure that allows the municipalities to share management tools and staff. However, this type of network government seems to be the favourable environment needed for the development of modern methods of co-operative work. In fact, its main objective consists of testing its value-added output for each one of the municipalities that compose the association and attaining a certain degree of 'performance legitimacy' in the eyes of its citizens.

Input legitimacy

The social services policy is supported, therefore, by the politicians' and the technicians' view is that it is necessary to surpass the territorial limits of the municipality, and that at the same time, it is fundamental to establish a lasting connection with citizens in order to create a feeling of belonging. This explains the importance (in order to encourage input legitimacy) that is placed on the creation of symbolic elements (the common name, the Ilex, is an example) and the rise of proximity and participation arenas particularly focused on immigrants and the elderly people. In this way, the aim is to develop a relational strategy between the association and the focus groups, which achieve better access to information and to social services and can directly express their demands to the incumbent politicians.

The role played by politicians in the network structure differs dramatically from the one that they play in their municipal councils. The indirect election of political leaders has two consequences: on the one hand, the board members are directly elected in their municipalities, and that is their original source of legitimacy; but on the other hand, in the association those councilmen act as representatives of their municipalities, and they defend their interests as they discuss the location of infrastructure or the contribution of each municipality. The interests of the different actors are not always the same. For politicians, the new network government has

become an instrument for the redistribution of power: the association's mandate reinforces the political power of the president of the association, and by extension the mayor's – usually the mayor of the main municipality. Thus, traditional Spanish municipal presidential rule has found a subtle form of expansion in the supra-municipal context. For the rest of the aldermen who are represented on the board, the intermunicipal space is an opportunity to expand their political influence by obtaining financial and technical advantages for their municipalities which they would not be able to obtain by themselves. In any case, this associative structure contributes to the exploration of new forms of public action and fosters the definition of joint projects. However, although opportunities for citizen participation do exist, the quality of representation is limited to the people who participate voluntarily and the openness of the agenda depends on the politicians' will since there are no formal mechanisms that guarantee the public's involvement.

Throughput legitimacy

The statute of the association establishes the following governmental organs: the board (*junta*), which consists of the councillors in charge of social services in every municipality, and the president and vice-president, who are elected by the members of the board. The board is a deliberative organ that can be regarded as being on an equal footing with the true intermunicipal government. The consequences of this organisation are the rise of a policy-making model based on dialogue, negotiation and consensus between the political representatives of every municipality about service delivery projects in the supra-municipal territory.

We see that the relations between the municipality and the association of municipalities cannot be compared to the relations among independent institutions; the transfer of competences does not lead to a clear distinction between the missions of both institutions, whose borders remain blurred. Decisions are taken about projects of common interest for the municipalities, but citizens and focus groups are excluded from the task of defining these interests, which is reserved for the aldermen forming the board. It can also be demonstrated that the experience of joint management can improve the quality of the delivery of services, or can allow the delivery of new services that provide sources of legitimacy. Nevertheless, if it is assumed that the citizen is an important actor in the policy-making process, network governance decision-making has a certain degree of democratic deficit that turns out in a low quality of citizen participation. There are three causes for this: the indirect election of political appointees does not help the quality of participation; the intervention of

multiple institutional actors (municipalities, regional government, intermunicipal association) leads to overlaps, opacity and a lack of understanding on the part of citizens concerning the decisions made; and despite the implication of the focus groups in some activities, the municipal association does not take advantage of all the participatory potential of these forms of management.

4.2 Hanover: intermunicipal cooperation and regional government

Despite the division established by the German Constitution between two basic levels of government (the Federation and the Länder), in practice German local authorities have strengthened their position in the institutional system by taking on responsibilities via amalgamation during the 60s and 70s in West Germany and since the 90s in the East German Länder (Franzke 2006).

On November 1st 2001, an extensive collaboration was initiated around the city of Hanover to manage some supra-municipal matters. Competition between a large urban settlement (Hanover) and its neighbouring towns (20 local authorities) was replaced by a cooperative organisation in charge of the management of common policies. Its territorial area comprises 3,000 square kilometres and nearly 1.2 million inhabitants in the city of Hanover (46 per cent) and its area of influence is (54 per cent).

Roughly following the model of the former district of the state (*Land*), the new supra-municipal government was organised as a directly elected assembly, with a committee and a president of the executive, who was also directly elected. The co-operative area of Hanover became the largest territorial corporation in Germany (*Gebietskörperschaft*), and only remotely comparable to the cooperative structures of Saarbrücken, Frankfurt and Stuttgart, considering the differences in the populations involved and the fact that these cases did not change the institutions of the state in the way that Hanover did. Indeed, the creation of the Hanover area brought functional reform with it through the transfer of powers from the district and the department of Hanover (*Bezirksregierung/Kreisebene*) and from the former municipal association. The result was the creation of a new intermunicipal cooperative structure with the typical features of a district (*Landkreis*). In other words, this structure has an autonomous organisation that assumes powers in areas such as economic development, employment, schools, housing, environment, refuse collection and water supply, and which is responsible for matters (suburban trains, regional plan-

ning) that had previously been managed by the municipal association (which ceased to exist) and the local authorities. Since the nature of the municipal responsibilities depends on the number of inhabitants, the creation of this ‘urban region’ seems compatible with an asymmetric system of task distribution, in which competences are unequally distributed over layers of government.

The Hanover case should be regarded as a very special case in terms of its configuration: it is located between an intermunicipal cooperation model and a strong regional government in a unified administrative unit whose political representatives are directly elected. Based on municipal cooperation, this structure tries to counterbalance territorial fragmentation with the establishment of a unified regional administration, under the permanent presence of the Land, the ultimate body in charge of territorial organisation.

Input legitimacy

Transferring decision-making to networks always raises problems of legitimacy about the democratic nature of the decisions made. To ensure input legitimacy, the Hanover region has opted to allocate responsibility to the core of the institution, the assembly. However, network-like structures cannot be democratically legitimised through directly elected assemblies alone, which reproduce the schemes of representative democracy and place political parties in the centre of the system, while citizens are limited to the role of clients of the municipal services. This structure can be seen as a peculiar mixture of regional government and the inter-organisational interaction of government and governance, where successful management depends more on bargaining between political and societal actors than on decisions made in the representative assembly.

Without a doubt, the creation of the cooperative area of Hanover has improved the external representation of the whole region and built a service-delivery system based on an autonomous and single administration through the mechanism of sharing charges and benefits, and has improved the effectiveness of policy management in several areas (e.g., territorial management and environmental protection). This was made possible by the transformation of a constellation of municipalities into an ingenious cooperative enterprise with *ad hoc* structures and procedures. The new regional space is not yet a physical territory, but it is a ‘functional space’ constituted in the process of cooperation (Benz 2001), where every local authority discards the role of monopolistic service producer to become a member of a supra-municipal service-delivery network.

Its intermunicipal nature provides room for facilitating citizen participation in policy-making in order to promote a closer identification of the population with its regional community. However, opportunities for participation and the quality of this participation do not achieve the full range of possibilities that the regional structure offers. The use of traditional tools of representation (like direct and universal suffrage) can bring input legitimacy to political decisions, although it does not guarantee the quality of representation and the openness of the political agenda. Besides, this experience shows the extent to which it is necessary to reinvent new rules of representation to make municipal democracy compatible with the new forms of intermunicipal representation. This implies redefining citizenship that adapts, and makes compatible, the stretching of the physical boundaries of the new intermunicipal structures to the traditional (municipal) limits of political representation.

Throughput legitimacy

One of the most interesting elements of this type of regional government is its intention to solve the traditional problem of scale not by amalgamation policies but by means of stable cooperative tools. Thanks to these cooperative instruments municipal governments participate in policies that were once alien to them; the district-city of Hanover shares the costs of centrality, and it is now one part of a complex municipal system, with different types of municipalities and different spheres of action. The municipality, an entity that was closed and limited in its capacity for action, becomes a political actor that has its own voice in the context of a network that is able to compete with other regional actors, and even with state actors. The result of this is a cooperative intermunicipal structure that is strengthened by a regional administrative authority and a directly elected assembly.

Nevertheless, the new governmental design faces a number of challenges: promoting the shared feeling of belonging to a region, which can provide a basis for developing joint strategies in the cross-boundary network, is more difficult than just creating new institutions. The political and administrative cultures of the partners (city of Hanover vs. rural areas) differ and confidence and consensus-building measures are necessary: the more heterogeneous and unequal areas are, the more strongly regional governance will be affected. Intermunicipal relations are embedded in a common institution, but the permanence of cooperation is supported by mutual trust and on-going communication. On the other hand, all the municipalities expect the collaborative structure to eliminate friction and integrate fragmentation in a functional way, but we cannot forget that the voluntary nature of the association

implies individual cost-benefit considerations from each actor. In that sense, the degree of institutionalisation attained can condition the global results and, the resistance of some local politicians to the development of regional structures can be linked to a fear that they reduce municipal autonomy. The Hanover case corresponds to a network-like form of cooperation based on permanent negotiation between municipal partners, but supplemented by shared top-down government structures which can perform regulatory functions.

It is true that the overlap of the systems of representation (regional assembly-municipal councils) can limit the transparency of public action and make citizen control of political responsibility difficult. Perhaps one of the main advantages of this network-like system is the flexibility and effectiveness achieved in the management of supra-municipal services, but the price to be paid can be high in terms of democratic control and checks and balances between the municipalities and the new regional government. More flexibility means more complexity and more opacity, especially when the individual citizen is not allowed to participate as a civic collaborator and management requirements do not fit democratic accountability demands. In this sense, this co-operative structure does not solve the problems of opacity, poor citizen involvement in policy-making and protection of small municipalities and the weakest social groups.

5. Practices of consolidated regional government

This section describes and analyses two cases of regional policies made by a kind of regional government.

5.1 Greater London: spatial planning

The Greater London Authority was established in 2000 (see for instance Pimlott and Rao 2002; Goldsmith 2005). This metropolitan authority consists of a directly elected mayor and an assembly elected by proportional voting. The mayor prepares and executes policies, whereas the assembly's main function is scrutiny. The boroughs keep their jurisdiction within the London area. The GLA's main policy fields cover spatial development, transport, planning, and environment. When the GLA was established, most of its tasks were provincial ones and it did not get local or

national responsibilities. According to most of the respondents, the distinction between the tasks that must be fulfilled by the GLA and those that the boroughs are responsible for is clear. Competences seem to suffice.

The Mayor of London decides on the 'Strategic Development Strategy' (SDS). London's strategies were formulated in the London Plan 2004. This is a fully-fledged spatial plan, setting the strategic direction for local developments. The boroughs are currently obliged to formulate spatial policies in 'Local Development Frameworks' (LDFs). Substantial community involvement is one of the aims of the LDFs. The mayor has supervisory powers and may demand that changes be made to local plans that have been formulated by the boroughs. His powers go even further: 'The boroughs are required to consult the mayor on planning applications of "potential strategic importance". He is able to command and support these applications or, if he considers it necessary on strategic planning grounds, direct the borough to refuse planning permission' (GLA 2002). But the mayoral powers have their limits. Local plans are not subject to the mayor's approval. Individual boroughs themselves determine whether their plans are in general conformity with the London Plan, after having consulted the mayor. On the other hand, the mayor has no formal obligation whatsoever to account for his policies to the boroughs. The boroughs did not lose competences with the establishment of the GLA.

Input legitimacy

The input legitimacy of the government of London seems to be safeguarded rather well. The quality of *representation* is especially apparent. At the regional or metropolitan level the Greater London Authority has considerable statutory powers with regard to spatial planning. The GLA consists of both a directly elected assembly as well as a directly elected mayor. The mayor is responsible for drawing up a 'Spatial Development Strategy' and deciding upon it, whereas the assembly scrutinises the activities of the mayor. Directly elected councils also exist at the local borough level which, in some cases, have directly elected mayors. When the other criteria of input legitimacy are taken into consideration, the positive score seems to fade. *Opportunities for participation* do exist. Everyone is entitled to make proposals for the Spatial Development Strategy, although these must be within particular frameworks. Politicians set these frameworks, which restricts the openness of the agenda. Consultation procedures and cooperation with public as well as private actors are also expressions of opportunities for participation. It has to be mentioned, though, that the level of cooperation is less the result of statutory requirements than of the decisions and

demands of the Mayor of London. The opportunities for participation may be there, but in practice they seem to lead to a lack of openness. The mayor is rather selective in inviting actors to participate.

In summary, input legitimacy is strongest when it comes to the quality of representation. Opportunities for participation and the openness of the agenda are not very strong. The creation of the GLA has seemingly no effect on the input legitimacy of the boroughs.

Throughput legitimacy

Several actors are substantially involved in GLA policymaking in general and with regard to spatial policies: the Mayor of London, followed by the Secretary of State, GLA members of cabinet, GLA bureaucrats, and mayors/leaders of London boroughs. Boroughs as such play an advisory role; citizens are consulted, at best. Respondents characterise the decision-making process as rather political, not administrative; balanced on an 'open – closed' scale and a 'consensus – special interest' scale; more top-down than bottom-up; more formal than informal. Despite the mayor's powers, national government potentially has a big say in London's spatial development. The mayor must consult the Secretary of State (Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions 2000). The Secretary of State may prevent publication of the SDS in order to avoid 'any inconsistency with current national policies or relevant regional planning guidance' or 'any detriment to the interests of an area outside Greater London' (Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions 2000). In addition, the Secretary of State retains the power to call in any development plan that is contrary to national policy. When it comes to the implementation of spatial policies, cooperation seems to be the keyword. The mayor is not the executor, but needs to collaborate with the London boroughs, first of all. Besides this public-public cooperation, public-private partnerships have had much attention in the London plans. The roles the private sector is expected to play are huge, not least because of their financial resources (Thornley 2003).

The picture of the throughput legitimacy is as follows: decision-making seems to be balanced, though somewhat top-down and formal. Checks and balances do exist, the GLA and the mayor have considerable powers, but those powers are not exclusive. National government still plays an important role. Nevertheless, there is room for criticism. In 2002 the Planning Advisory Committee of the Greater London Assembly published a report titled 'Behind Closed Doors' (GLA 2002), which states

that there is a lack of information provided to the London citizenry and that the mayor seemed to disregard feedback from the boroughs. The Assembly, despite its statutory duty to scrutinise the mayor's policies, equally lacks information and influence; checks and balances should be improved. On the other hand, since central government is influential there are checks and balances in the central-regional relations.

The quality of citizen participation, however, is rather low. Citizens may express their wishes, and according to some respondents the mayor does consult the citizenry, but they certainly do not play any role in decision-making. Citizen involvement in the priority-setting process is rather limited (cf. Thornley 2003). The report 'Behind Closed Doors' (GLA 2002) severely criticised the planning practices of the London Mayor, highlighting the habit of acting behind closed doors in particular. In such a case, participation may not be as simple as expected. Although the situation prior to the establishment of the GLA is not quite clear, we may conclude that reform did have an effect. Powers and responsibilities are clearer than before, checks and balances have improved. But this result is at the metropolitan level. We did not find any effect on the throughput legitimacy of the boroughs themselves.

5.2 Copenhagen: spatial planning in the Greater Copenhagen region

The second case of the regional government strategy is spatial planning in the metropolitan area of the Danish capital Copenhagen. Between 2000 and 2007 a regional authority, the Hovedstadens Udviklingsråd, or Greater Copenhagen Authority (GCA), existed in Copenhagen. The GCA consisted of three counties, Copenhagen, Frederiksborg and Roskilde and covered 50 municipalities. The GCA consisted of a council and a board. The members of the county and municipality councils in the Greater Copenhagen area elected the members of the GCA Council from among their own members. The GCA Council, in turn, elected the Board, according to a proportional system. The main tasks of the GCA were the coordination of regional spatial, transport and tourism policies.

Metropolitan authorities in Copenhagen have never had a stable position in the administrative system. Like its predecessors, the GCA was characterised as a 'weak metropolitan authority' (Andersen et al. 2002). As respondents observed, it had to deal with powerful local governments, the split loyalties of GCA council members and a lack of financial resources. Focussing on spatial planning in particular, the

picture hardly changes. Spatial planning in Denmark is highly decentralised, which results in strong, highly autonomous municipalities. Although some checks and balances exist, the powers of national government are limited. Due to the autonomy of local government and the intermunicipal character of the regional body, the GCA was unable to make a stand vis-à-vis local government in spatial planning. The GCA was unable to really coordinate activities, or to establish the priorities of urban development. It is mainly limited to the 'Finger Plan' and to traffic policies.

The GCA was abolished on January 1st 2007, as a part of a structural reform, i.e. a radical reorganisation of Danish sub-national government. Although this confronted the authors with some difficulty, it did not affect the analysis. Moreover, the debate on structural reform provided valuable insights into the legitimacy of local and regional government in general, and the GCA in particular.

GCA and the legitimacy of local government

We will now present an analysis of the effects of the creation of a regional tier of government on the legitimacy of local government. This question is especially important in the light of long-running discussions about the position, and especially the legitimacy, of regional governance in the Copenhagen Area (see Andersen 2001: 143; Andersen and Hovgaard 2003; Desfor and Jørgensen 2004: 487).

Input legitimacy

There are opportunities for participation in spatial policy-making at the local level, for example,. in public hearings on lokalplaner (sub-municipal level). In practice however, according to respondents consultation is difficult due to the technical complexity of the plans. Actual participation is low (an estimated 2,000-3,000 people attend public hearings annually, from a population of 1.5 million). We conclude that the GCA did not seriously affect the opportunities for participation at the local level. At the regional level, hardly any opportunities for participation existed. The quality of representation at the regional level was poor. GCA members were indirectly elected, which resulted in split loyalties due to the dual mandate. This indirect (or borrowed) legitimacy was a problem, contrary to what is argued by Lefevre (1998). The GCA seemingly did not affect the quality of representation at the local level. To be precise, the quality of representation at the local level in itself has not been studied. The limited openness of the agenda adds to the lack of input legitimacy. The regular hearing procedures at the local level can be characterised as formal and as essentially reactive. Citizens face strict development frameworks.

The ‘Kvarterplaner’ are an exception. Kvarterplaner were introduced between 1997 and 2001, when Copenhagen experimented with District Councils. The Kvarterplaner were area plans for the districts. These plans, as in the Holmbladsgade quarter for example, were characterised by early citizen involvement in the planning process, the election of (resident) representatives, an open agenda, substantial influence on plans, high levels of participation by local citizens and professional support. Kvarterplaner provided a great deal of legitimacy for the spatial development policies at the local level. After the abolishment of the District Councils (as a result of a referendum), some Kvarterplaner initiatives were upheld. A limited number still existed in 2007, even though Kvarterplaner are no longer part of formal spatial development procedures. The GCA had no effect on Kvarterplaner.

To summarise the input legitimacy of spatial policy-making was rather poor, especially at the regional level. The establishment of the GCA does not seem to have affected the input legitimacy of local government.

Throughput legitimacy

When information is collected on the second type of legitimacy, i.e. throughput, the picture hardly changes. GCA decision-making seems to have been of a closed nature. Only a limited set of actors were substantially involved in the decision-making process at the regional level, especially the municipal mayors and the regional councillors (according to the GCA respondents). Citizens were not involved. We found no evidence of local decision-making becoming more closed, or open as a result of the existence or functioning of the GCA. It is interesting to see, however, that local spatial development plans were also discussed among municipal representatives (councillors, mayors and municipal bureaucrats) at the regional level. This might have affected throughput legitimacy negatively, since directly elected representatives draw up these plans. Alternately, it might have affected throughput legitimacy positively, since more actors are involved in decision-making.

The quality of participation at the regional level is very poor due to the absence of participation opportunities. At the local level there is some participation, depending on the nature of the plans involved. Respondents score citizens’ participation as follows: the GCA first informed citizens about strategic plans, then sometimes consulted them, or sometimes asked citizens to advise. In general, public debate is rare and causes only minor changes in local plans. Only in the case of small-scale project plans is there sometimes substantial public debate. Local involvement is hampered by financial problems and a lack of quality controls. Calls for opportunities for the

public to participate face resistance from amongst others, the mayor, No examples could be found of the changing quality of citizen participation as a result of the GCA.

The existence of *checks and balances* is difficult to deal with. National government used to have a rather significant say, due to which a 'go it alone' strategy on the part of the GCA was unlikely. At the same time, the position of local authorities in spatial planning is still strong. Although the GCA could have affected the checks and balances in Danish spatial policies by counter weighing local interests, it was unable to do so in practice.

After the structural reform

On January 1st 2007, the GCA was abolished. Most county and GCA capacities have been transferred to the municipalities. Spatial development has become a mainly local issue. The need for coordinating action still exists, however. One of the respondents foresees that the municipalities in the Copenhagen area will try to coordinate matters of regional importance in a cooperating body of municipalities, based on both legally enforced and voluntary intermunicipal cooperation.

6. Analysis and conclusions

Sometimes, formal political and administrative structures are not useful as arenas for public action. In their place some models of inter-institutional networks and new ways of cooperation between the public and private sectors arise. These organisational models bring with them more open and flexible ways of steering, which carry different forms of relations and a common perception of interests to the outside. The success of these initiatives depends on the establishment of clear and distinctive tasks in relation to other governments, effective leadership and an adequate degree of sharing of advantages and costs, and, above all, on the capacity to reach a sufficient degree of legitimacy.

It is interesting to see that the cases included in this study are not really 'pure' ones. The Greater London Authority is a genuine example of a regional government; the 'Ilex', the intermunicipal cooperation of municipalities near Madrid is exactly what it says. But the other two cases are not easy to characterise. The Greater Copenhagen Council was established by law and it used to have some statutory powers. Its structure, however, was one of cooperation. The case of Hanover results in yet

another model. Its basis is intermunicipal cooperation, but the council and the president of the executive board are elected directly. Copenhagen and Hanover, therefore, might be called hybrid kinds of regional governments.

That being said, we can provide an overview of the findings regarding democratic legitimacy (Table 1).

Table 8.1. Legitimacy in four European regions

	Ilex, Madrid	**Greater Copenhagen Authority**	**Hanover**	**Greater London Authority**
Kind of regional governance	Voluntary intermunicipal cooperation	Obligatory intergovernmental cooperation	Intermunicipal cooperation, directly elected	Directly elected regional government
Input legitimacy: opportunities for participation	New foundations for participation, especially by focus groups	Hardly existing at the regional level, low at local level	Low, but representative democracy strengthened	They exist on the basis of consultation, cooperation
Input legitimacy: quality of representation	Indirect representation	Indirect representation	Direct elections for council and president of executive board	Direct elections of both Assembly and Mayor
Input legitimacy: openness of agenda	Partially opened to focus groups	Closed and reactive, especially at the regional level; with exceptions	Closed. Different levels of agenda-setting	Frameworks are set by political actors
Throughput	Support by	Closed, for-	Vague distri-	Public-public

legitimacy: way of decision making	all municipal councils required, thus consensual	mal, consensual; limited number of actors involved	bution of responsibilities	cooperation; consensual, rather top-down and formal
Throughput legitimacy: quality of participation	Potentially high	Non-existent at the regional level, low at local level	Low	Little quality, due to closed nature of networks
Throughput legitimacy: checks and balances	Necessity of consensus between municipalities may guarantee checks and balances, but may also lead to veto power	Influence of central government	Guaranteed by unclear distribution of responsibilities	If any, then through influence of the central government
Did regionalisation affect either input or throughput legitimacy of local government?	Minimal changes to input legitimacy. Municipal aldermen and the mayor potentially gain power, hence throughput legitimacy of local government may increase	No changes to input legitimacy. Potentially changing throughput legitimacy, however not in practice	Input legitimacy seems to hardly be effected. Throughput legitimacy has decreased since capacities have been transferred to the regional level	Neither had any affect.

Due to the exploratory character of these case studies, our conclusions are tentative. In general it is obvious that there are no clear relations between the structure of regional governance on the one hand and legitimacy on the other. We will therefore briefly discuss the various kinds of legitimacy.

1. Opportunities for participation at the regional level (input legitimacy) seem to be best safeguarded in both 'pure cases'. In London the creation of the GLA was accompanied by increasing opportunities for participation, near Madrid the same holds for intermunicipal cooperation. In Copenhagen and Hanover there is less progress in this respect.
2. The quality of representation at the regional level (input legitimacy) is highest in London and Hanover. In both cities citizens are entitled to elect representatives as well as the mayor. In Copenhagen and the Ilex near Madrid representation is only indirect, since local councillors elect a representative organ at the regional level.
3. The picture of the third element of input legitimacy at the regional level, that is, the openness of agendas, is a rather negative one. In three out of four cases the policy agenda is a closed one. Only in the Ilex near Madrid did we find opportunities for focus groups to influence the agenda (in part).
4. The process of decision-making (throughput legitimacy) is in most cases of a consensual nature. But the actors who have to find consensus differ. In London, public and private actors cooperate, whereas in Copenhagen and the Ilex only governmental actors seek consensus.
5. The quality of participation (throughput legitimacy) results in a disappointing picture. In Copenhagen participation in regional policy-making is almost absent; in London and Hanover its quality is rather low. The Ilex is the only one where this is potentially high, but we did not find indications that such participation actually exists.
6. Checks and balances (throughput legitimacy) do exist – sometimes due to the influence of central government (London and Copenhagen), sometimes because of the cooperative nature of the regional governance structure (Ilex).

Authorities' first aim consists of solving practical problems through governmental cooperation even when there is not always capillarity between regional governance and democracy. The lack of legitimacy is sometimes recognised and may occasionally even be one of the reasons for the reforms as such. Looking at the practices, one

may very well doubt whether institutional actors sincerely perceive it to be a real problem. The absence of deliberate efforts to improve democratic legitimacy, the relative closeness of the agenda and the low quality of citizen participation in all of the cases, the indirect mechanisms of participation in the Madrid and Copenhagen cases and the limited participation opportunities in Copenhagen and Hanover are factors that reveal a deep gap between governance instruments (that is, the creation of regional structures to face performance problems in the delivery of services) and the requirements of democracy in terms of citizen inclusion and checks and balances.

The main question in this study was whether regionalisation affected either the input or throughput legitimacy of local government. We can conclude that regionalisation hardly affected the input legitimacy of local authorities. In most cases, neither opportunities, nor the quality of representation, nor the openness of the agenda underwent serious changes as results of the creation of a regional tier of government or intermunicipal cooperation. The conclusions regarding throughput legitimacy of local authorities are less clear. The process of decision-making evidently changed, not least due to a transfer of capacities in some cases. Especially in instances of intermunicipal cooperation, representatives of each local authority became co-decision-makers in regional matters, leaving behind local councillors. The quality of participation in local matters seems to be unaffected, while checks and balances change due to the already mentioned transfer of powers.

There are no clear relations between the structure of regional governance and local or regional legitimacy. Part of the developments in legitimacy may very well be a result of a transfer of local powers to the regional level. But as the London case shows, that is not a necessary condition; powers may come from other tiers of government. Another final remark is that the transfer of powers to the regional or intermunicipal structure can imply the transfer of legitimacy as well, since the creation of the strongest entity able to provide essential services can become the new political reference for citizens at the medium-term.

Appendix. Interviews and questionnaires

Copenhagen

- Roudaina Al Khani, Architect and urban planner, Center for Byudviklung, Kobenhavns Kommune, (semi-structured interview, 21/09/2006)
- John Andersen, professor Sociology, Roskilde University (open interview, 03/05/2005).
- Cecilie Bredenfeld Matzen, Head of section (questionnaire, open and closed questions, 02/02/2007)
- Mette Munch Cristensen, on behalf of the Hovedstadens Udviklingsråd and its chairman Mads Lebech (questionnaire, open and closed questions, received 04/07/2006)
- Johannes Due, Chairman of the Commission on Administrative Structure , (open questions via email, received 08/11/2006)
- Claus Hermansen; Vicekontorchef; Hovedstadens Udviklingsråd (questionnaire, open and closed questions; received 02/08/2006)
- John Jørgensen, senior researcher Nordregio and Dept. of Urban and Landscape Studies, KVL, Copenhagen (open interview, 03/05/2005).
- Jens Ole Nielsen, Fagdirektør Kobenhavns Kommune, Teknik – og Miljøforvaltningen, Plan & Arkitektur, (semi-structured interview, 21/09/2006)

Madrid

- Randa Sayegh; President of the municipal association (semi-structured interview, 23/06/2006)
- Mª José Gallego Muñoz; Chief of the area of Information and Documentation on Environment (semi-structured interview, 24/06/2006)
- Pedro Pérez, Secretary of the inter-municipal association (semi-structured interview, 24/06/2006)

London

- Kevin Hazell; Senior Professional – Policy, London Borough of Harrow (questionnaire, open and closed questions, received 11/07/2006)
- Debbie McMullen, Head of the London Plan Team, policy & partnerships, Greater London Authority (questionnaire, open and closed questions, received 25/07/2006)

- London Borough of Haringey, anonymous officer (questionnaire, open and closed questions, received July 2007)

Hanover

- Hanover municipality, anonymous officer (questionnaire, open and closed questions, received September 2006)
- Region Hanover, anonymous officer (questionnaire, open and closed questions, received October 2006)

Chapter nine

The Dynamics of Democratic Learning

Arthur Ringeling
Harry Daemen
Linze Schaap

1. Discussing the results

In the first chapter, we observed that the reforms in European local democracies are remarkable for their similarities, despite significant differences in historic development, structure and cultural in European countries. This isomorphism is illustrated in several recent studies, both in country-by-country comparative studies (among others Loughlin (ed.) 1999; Caulfield and Larsen (eds.) 2002; Denters and Rose (eds.) 2005) and in thematic ones (Bäck, Heinelt and Magnier (eds.) 2006; Berg and Rao (eds.) 2005); Bäck, Gjelstrup, Helgesen, Johansson and Klausen (eds.) 2005).

We also considered that the empirical knowledge is still rather limited. One conclusion, though, does not need any more proof: the way local democracy functions is one of the problems that all local governments in Western Europe are facing (Daemen and Schaap 2000; Caulfield and Larsen 2002; Kersting and Vetter 2003; Denters and Rose 2005). Additional isomorphism can be found in the ways governments address democratic problems. We distinguished four strategies: strengthening the existing model of representation, broadening the concept of representation, applying customer democracy, and adding direct and participative democratic ideas and instruments to electoral representation.

The adventure in this book was to travel beyond country-by-country comparisons and one-theme studies. Instead, we structured the book around theoretically and empirically based themes, which we called 'puzzles'. The authors compared projects of reform, which addressed those themes. Thus, the book provides comparative knowledge that goes beyond observing and classifying differences between coun-

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tries. It thus presents concrete cases of democratic reform in order to analyse the dynamics of reform projects and to investigate its consequences.

In the first chapter, we formulated the following focal questions of this book: “How do European municipalities address the contested character of local democracy? What kind of reforms do they introduce, and what are the results?” To answer these questions, the authors presented concrete cases of democratic reform, in order to analyse the dynamics of reform projects and to investigate its consequences. Each chapter presented the results of original case-studies. In this final chapter (in the sections 2, 4 and 4), we will discuss those results and summarise what they mean to the puzzles formulated in the first chapter. In section 5 we draw some conclusions.

2. Puzzles related to representation and its alternatives

A. Revitalising the representative model

The first puzzle refers to the attractiveness and vitality of the existing democratic practice. Meant as it is to ‘make citizens present’ in the process of local decision-making, the representative model nowadays seems to estrange the citizen from ‘his’ local government; representation as a barrier, rather than a bridge. Indicators of this are the decrease in voting turnout, the unattractiveness of political parties as shown by their dramatically low membership, and other more qualitative indicators of loss of trust in elected politicians and democratic politics in general. This leads to the question whether adjusting the representative model to the demands of present-day political life is a fruitful approach.

The studies in Almere, Newham and Wiesbaden deal with experiments which intend to stay close to the representative model. They give different answers to our puzzle. In Newham a very pragmatic attitude is chosen. The ‘influential councillor’ is a communicative instrument for the mayor: ‘influential councillors’ are acting as the eyes and ears of the mayor and as mediators between problems in wards and neighbourhoods and the problem-solving capacity in the town hall. It looks as if new enthusiasm has been generated among councillors, while citizens are more adequately helped and local civil servants seem to have been redirected in order to be more attentive to public needs presented by this new model of representation. Whether this will substantially change the democratic political climate in Newham, however, remains to be seen. In contrast, the innovations in Wiesbaden are based on a negative analysis of local democratic practice. The former voting system was seen

as unattractive for the voter: it offered them little room to for a precise expression of their political preferences. Also the position of the political parties was considered to be too strong. Innovators in Wiesbaden hoped to alleviate these problems with technical solutions: some interesting adaptations of the voting procedures were implemented. Not with very much success, however. In the third case, Almere, the unattractiveness of the political practices in and around the council were targeted by the introduction of the 'political market'. Even if the quantitative results of this innovation are not what was hoped for (no substantial increase in participation in representative politics) it can be seen as a significant attempt to make the council meetings more interesting and less bureaucratic. For those involved, the political market has resulted in a substantial improvement of local democracy.

Does this solve the puzzle as formulated previously? Given the results of the three rather different reforms, it is unrealistic to expect grand results from innovations like these. Changing the local practices of representation is a process, which will most probably take some time. And during this time, innovative enthusiasm has to be kept alive – no small task for the political leadership. The results of the three reforms are too modest to be the final answers to the puzzle in question. Hardly any quantitative improvements were reported and the qualitative results may well be the mental constructs of enthusiasts, involved in a process of change in which they believe. Nevertheless, we may conclude that innovations within the boundaries of the representative system are possible. The three cases show some rather technical and organisational changes, implying no radical turnover.

The success of these democratic innovations appears to be linked to (political) leadership. The commitment of political and/or bureaucratic leaders, acting as 'carriers of the creed', explains much of the success in two of our cases.

The importance of leadership and public enthusiasm suggests that democratic reform requires continued attention and this involves a constant process of change and of looking for better methods. Innovative ideas such as the political market in Almere seem to be more promising than a mere strengthening of existing roles and procedures. Finally, we observe that it is not so much the concrete results, but rather the introduction of an attitude of constant democratic learning which mostly contributes to revitalising local democracy.

B. Tensions between representative and participative democracy

Puzzle two refers to the contradictory situation where democracy's character is representative, while many reforms aim at introducing elements of participatory democ-

racy into the practice of local government. The classical representative model stresses the role of the elected politician and his legitimate right to decide on behalf of society. Participatory models stress the need of societal participation in public decision-making and insist on more modest and different roles of elected politicians. The question then is, whether these roles can be combined. It was this question which Edwards tried to answer in Chapter 3.

The description of the development of participatory practices in Kristiansand nicely illustrates a learning process in which especially the council had to develop and get accustomed to new forms of democratic governance, including strong participation of the local civil society. Crucial in this process was the elaboration of a balance between giving direction and leaving room for participation. The newest arrangements in Kristiansand require politicians to play a complex role; on the one hand the somewhat distant role of framers of the process, by defining the priorities to be elaborated by participatory workgroups and, on the other hand, a more active role of involvement in the actual work of the participatory groups. Too much commitment would frustrate their later role as selectors, when the council makes final choices; too little commitment might lead to policy proposals that are too far away from what is politically acceptable. The situation is different in Lewisham. The position of the council vis-à-vis a directly elected mayor is already rather weak. The participatory game is played between the executive and civil society. Of course, councillors take part in these processes, but since they have no strong role to play in the final decision-making, they tend to focus on the role of 'advocates in support of their constituency'. A comparable situation was found in Almere. As in Lewisham, the position of the council in policy-making was weakened as a result of the 'dualisation' of the relationships between council and executive. Participatory democracy in a dualistic situation like Lewisham and Almere happens between the executive and the citizenry.

Thus, in Edwards' words, the tension between participatory and representative democracy shifts to the interface between citizens and executive. This suggests a component of the emerging new role of representative politicians: to act as brokers between executive and civil society, to advocate specific interests of their voters, and to involve the citizens in their role as supervisor over the work of the executive. However, Edwards warns, the more successful the council is in repositioning itself in the participatory arena of executive and citizens, the more likely it is that the old tensions between representation and participation re-emerge.

If we reflect on the second puzzle we may conclude that there is a real tension between participation and representation. All three cases demonstrate this. But it is not only the tension between the primacy of politics and delegation of policy-making to participatory bodies. It is also a tension between politicians staying at a distance in order to facilitate free participatory processes and politicians who will have to find ways to give some direction to the participatory processes, in view of their later role as final decision-makers. All three cases demonstrate how councillors are involved in a process of democratic learning. They learn to find a new balance between representation and participation. No definitive formulae or rules have been established, but it is clear that such new rules will not be simple ones. Elected politicians will have to learn that their legitimacy cannot be derived solely from the fact of being elected, but will have to be endorsed by intelligent involvement in participatory processes. This can be formulated the other way around: it seems to be a mistake to assume that politicians can leave participatory processes to their own dynamics. Limiting their work to shaping and monitoring participatory processes may put them in a position where they may be forced to endorse policy proposals which would otherwise be unacceptable to them. So stimulating participation does not take away the obligation to give direction to public policy development.

The degree of 'dualisation', of separation between council and executive, has a strong impact on the tension between participation and representation. A strong council, deeply involved in policy-making is clearly in the midst of this tension. Dualisation, with the associated distancing of the council from the actual policy-making processes, leads to a shift of focus: in such a situation comparable tensions build-up between executive and civil society/citizens. It is interesting to observe how this tension will evolve in the more tri-partite situation created by dualisation (council-executive-citizens).

3. Puzzles related to alternative models in practice

C. Is e-democracy a useful instrument for the reinforcement of local democracy?
The third puzzle we formulated in Chapter 1, is whether and how e-democracy will affect local representative and participatory democracy?

Aström, Freschi and Montin studied experiments with e-democracy in Gothenburg in Sweden, Wolverhampton in the UK and Florence in Italy. The cases showed that above all e-democracy is an instrument for improving the local service delivery.

It has more important consequences on the output side of government than on its input side. As a result, the role of citizens in e-governance is reduced to that of a client, the receiver of local goods and services. The significance of e-democracy in enabling citizens to contribute to public decision-making, either by discussing local issues, or by casting their votes, or both is still very much a promise, rather than a practice.

The result is that the winners of e-democracy are hardly the citizens, the representatives, or local democracy. The experts and the professionals, parts of the local administrative organisation or other suppliers of goods and services take most advantage of it. Administrators gain by using this instrument. They are able to improve the way their organisation works. Even if citizens can gain by receiving better deliverance, they only marginally gain at the input side of local government. When they do, it is by setting the agenda for specific problems with which they are confronted, or by asking for solutions. So to some extent, the agenda setting process is changed. It should be remarked that only part of the citizenry uses the opportunity to participate: mostly the groups that were already active in the public domain. Political inequality is thus reinforced rather than limited by e-democracy. E-democracy, at least in the cases studied, does not lead to a renewed discourse between representatives and represented. The explanation for this is that politicians tend to not engage themselves in the e-context. This is perhaps because they see no role for themselves in "digital debates" and prefer to focus on the formal decision-making arena. It is also possible that they are too little acquainted with the possibilities of the new channels of communication.

We conclude that it is possible to improve local democracy with the use of e-democracy. Especially on the output side, progress is made. But far less where it concerns the input side – the process of political debate. Without an active engagement of the elected politicians, the promise of e-democracy remains unfulfilled.

D. Civil society's role in the enhancement of local democracy

The fourth puzzle refers to the tension between state-centred and society-centred conceptions of democracy. Will a strong civil society compete or support traditional local democracy? And, to what degree is civil society self-organisation a viable solution for issues of public governance?

These were the questions in Quinn's analysis of experiments with involvement of civil society actors in Copenhagen, Grenoble, and Limerick. In all three cases the initiative for involvement of civil society actors came from the government. And the

governmental actors are seen as being ‘responsible’ for the quality and quantity of civil society participation: representativeness; participation of minorities; mobilisation of inactive parts of society. The position of the institutions of representative government was not challenged in any way. The official actors kept a firm grip on the strategic aspects of policies involved. Civil society actors acted more or less as informants and advisors for local policy-makers, as promulgators of the participatory projects, but only to a limited degree as co-decision-makers. The decision-making role is strongest in the Copenhagen case, but even there the scope of the decisions is limited to making choices on projects which first were approved by the local council. In Limerick and Grenoble the advisory role, acting as a discussion partner for policy-makers, seems dominant. Yet all three cases contribute to the strengthening, the empowering, of civil society by stimulating the emergence of relevant local networks and by the contribution to the development of a feeling of ‘involvement’ in public governance. Quinn even mentions the emergence of ‘neighbourhood pride’ on the projects realised.

In the end the three cases and the analysis send a double message. On the one hand interesting results are documented, but on the other they urge us to be realistic: “Despite their institutional anchorage (…), the new structures (…) seem to reflect surface change rather than fundamental shifts (…)”. We may conclude that the cases shown do not portray ‘associative democracy’ as a challenger, let alone ‘competitor’ of the existing political institutions. It rather functions as a policy-making strategy, as a method for improving the quality of official policy-making. As a strategy, the processes of associative democracy seem to have a positive impact on public involvement, and on the development of local or communal civil society networks, which may improve the public governance capacity of the actors involved. It remains to be seen, whether these networks, thus strengthened in time, will compete with political institutions in the future.

4. Puzzles related to the changing context of local democracy

E. Can political leadership compensate for the loss of politicians’ power over the bureaucracy?

As we observed in Chapter 1, politicians seem to have lost power to professionals and local bureaucrats. At the same time, individual leadership seems to gain importance, sometimes via direct mayoral elections, sometimes because of media atten-

tion, sometimes because of both developments. The question is whether individual leadership can address the loss of political power to professionals and bureaucrats. That is the main question Bergstrom, Gianoli and Rao tried to answer in Chapter 7.

In the Italian case, in the 1990s directly elected mayors were introduced alongside a strengthening of winning political parties and a separation of legislative and executive bodies at the local level. These measures were attempts to address political corruption. The reform really led to a stronger position of the mayor, a greater accountability of mayors and thus to a stronger position of the electorate. According to the authors of Chapter 7, mayors have been better able to, "provide leadership for the wider community, address issues crossing organisational boundaries and requiring the co-operation of a range of different agencies (..)". Individual leaders seem to have regained some of the lost field. They were able to implement their political programmes and, so it seems, to acquire the necessary professional support for it. In the case of English local government, reforms were less clear. Local authorities were given a choice of executive models; in all of them political leadership was expected to be stronger than before (except the one meant for smaller municipalities; those were entitled to keep a revised committee system). Few local authorities opted for a directly elected mayor. In the other option, a leader-cabinet system, however, individual leadership is strengthened as well. Both systems have proved to be effective in providing visions for the area. Transparency has improved. Whether public accountability has gained as well, remains to be seen. The scrutiny function of local council is the least developed one, so it seems. In the Swedish case, we have to keep in mind that Sweden has a strong tradition of collective decision-making bodies. Nevertheless, individual leadership exists. It is not the result of reforms, but of individual attempts and local circumstances. Swedish managers who tried to apply the ideas of New Public Management and to pursue a more active stance often had to resign. Political primacy seems to be alive in Swedish local governments. Politicians achieving a leadership role seek co-operation in the local authority as well as in society. As a result, local politics become more visible, citizens perceive increased possibilities to influence local decision-making.

Alongside Bergstrom, Gianoli and Rao we may conclude that some political leaders seem to be able to overcome a general distrust against politics. Strong political leadership seems necessary to counterbalance the visionary and charismatic new managers who are in great demand. It thus may compensate for the increased power of local bureaucracy. Political parties and their ideologies are still important. The importance of individual leadership may grow but it does not entirely downplay

ideological differences. Finally, we observe that individual political leadership may, indeed, compensate for the loss of power of the political executive to the local bureaucracy and therefore, it does not seem to weaken representative democracy. Alternatively, we conclude that representative democracy and individual leadership may very well co-exist, and that the latter even may regain civic trust in politics.

F. Urban decentralisation and the gap between citizens and local government.
In Chapter 1, we observed that various reasons lay beneath decisions to urban decentralisation. Strengthening the link between citizens and government is one; relieving city hall of detail decision-making and service-delivery is another. Whatever the reasons for it may be, urban decentralisation will to some extent affect the gap between citizens and government. Does a reduction of the scale of local government lead to stronger local democracy, to bridging the gap between citizens and local government?

These different intentions, struggling for priority in practice, are interesting. They form a mix of democratic, administrative and managerial considerations. In practice neighbourhood councils are not the property of one local actor. Van Ostaaijen, Gianoli and Coulson described in Chapter 7 how neighbourhood councils worked in Bologna, Rotterdam and Birmingham. The gap between government and those who are governed is a consideration that is used in the cases they studied. Some cities focus on service delivery and emphasize the role of the citizen as a client.

The amount and the ways of institutionalisation also differ, as well as the decentralised jurisdiction. Despite these differences, there is a tendency of city politicians and bureaucrats to prevent neighbourhood councils from becoming too strong in relation to the central municipal organisation. The three neighbourhood councils did not offer a convincing picture themselves. These councils are strongly self-referential, deliberating about their jurisdiction, their internal organisation, and their relation with the central city. They certainly don't organise the participation of citizens in their neighbourhood. They fall short of being a source for decentralised influence and public engagement, close to the citizens, knowing and expressing their concerns. The emphasis is on strategy and planning, more than on improving local democracy.

Considering the analysis of the three cases, we may conclude that neighbourhood councils hardly function as a way of diminishing the gap between city government and citizens. Other considerations for decentralising local government play

a more dominant role; the neighbourhood councils can function as an implementation tool for municipal government. They are less designed as a vehicle for improving the democratic influence of citizens. And even if they are created as a tool of democratic improvement, to diminish the gap between citizens and government, the neighbourhood councils often don't act accordingly. Rather, they tend to duplicate the problematic game of local council politics for which they were meant to be a solution.

G. Regionalisation and democratic legitimacy of local government

In the network society decisions often have to be made by either regional authorities or in intergovernmental networks (if not public-private networks). Especially local councils seem to lose ground. Do local authorities lose legitimacy, or, quite paradoxically, win in this respect?

Ruano, Schaap and Karsten (Chapter 8) analysed the effects of regionalisation on the input legitimacy as well as the throughput legitimacy (not: output legitimacy) of local governments. They studied four cases, distinguishing two situations: the creation of a regional tier of government and inter-municipal co-operation. In both situations authorities' first aim consisted of solving practical problems through governmental cooperation. The lack of legitimacy of these regional arrangements was sometimes recognised and may occasionally even have been one of the reasons for the reforms as such. Institutional actors do not seem to perceive it to be a real problem. The absence of deliberate efforts to improve democratic legitimacy, the relative closeness of the agenda and the low quality of citizen participation in all of the cases, the indirect mechanisms of participation (Madrid and Copenhagen cases) and the limited participation opportunities (Copenhagen and Hanover) are factors that reveal a deep gap between governance instruments (that is, the creation of regional structures to face performance problems in the delivery of services) and the requirements of democracy in terms of citizen inclusion and checks and balances.

Regarding input legitimacy of local authorities, in most cases, neither opportunities, nor the quality of representation, nor the openness of the agenda underwent serious changes as a result of the creation of a regional tier of government or inter-municipal cooperation.

The conclusions regarding throughput legitimacy of local authorities were less clear. The process of decision-making evidently changed, not least due to a transfer of capacities in some cases. Especially in instances of inter-municipal cooperation, representatives of each local authority became co-decision-makers in regional mat-

ters, leaving behind local councillors. The quality of participation in local matters seems to be unaffected, while checks and balances change due to the already mentioned transfer of powers.

The conclusion is that there are no clear relations between the structure of regional governance and democratic legitimacy of local government. Part of the developments in legitimacy may have been a result of a transfer of local powers to the regional level, but this is not necessary the case; powers may come from other tiers of government too. The transfer of powers to the regional or inter-municipal structure can imply the transfer of legitimacy as well, since the creation of the strongest entity able to provide essential services can become the new political reference for citizens at the medium-term. The overall conclusion is that regionalisation hardly affects the democratic legitimacy of local government. There is no effect on input legitimacy, and only a limited effect on throughput legitimacy. Local governments hardly loose or win legitimacy as a result of regionalisation. This holds for the creation of a regional tier of government as well as inter-municipal co-operation. Whether democratic learning processes take place at the regional level is unclear.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Local democracy is confronted with severe problems. The cases studied in this book amply illustrate this. Awareness of these problems is manifest everywhere. But this does not imply that the problems are perceived and formulated in the same way. If there is a more general characterisation of the problem, it is that the relationship of local government with citizens is at stake.

Given the variety of problem descriptions, it is no surprise that solutions are looked for in different ways. A lot of ingenuity and creativity in all directions is displayed. It shows that local government is still a place for experimenting with new forms of governance.

Reform is not a matter of exclusive options. One type of democratic governance does not replace another. Different models of democracy, we learn from our cases, can co-exist. Representative and participative democracy, as well as representative and associative democracy, can go hand in hand. Moreover, even different forms of representation can co-exist in the same local government. But at the same time we observed that representative government has difficulties to reposition itself in the reformed arena of local democracy.

Even if "official politics" is often object of severe public criticism or cold neglect, it is remarkable to see how certain local politicians, like local party leaders, become more and more central in the decision-making processes. A possible explanation of this is that legitimacy is often organised around a (strong, charismatic) person. Also in local politics personality plays a bigger role. Political leadership could bring a new balance in the relationships between politicians and administrators. One kind of political leadership is the way directly elected mayors behave. They are inclined to operate less partisan, more in the middle of the local political spectrum. They also put the community more central, as their first priority. Another kind of political leadership is when councillors, or their leaders, take a leadership role. It seems likely that this new role of councillors partly replaces the communication between citizens and public officials.

Referring to leadership it is remarkable to observe that civil society often expects the official political system to show leadership, especially in stimulating reform and supervising and motivating the reform process. It looks as if stimulating and guarding the quality of local democracy is developing into one of the major tasks of elected politicians.

We also saw that e-democracy does not lead to a reinforcement of representative democracy. E-governance does fulfil some positive functions, but often these do not touch upon the quality of democratic debate (e-democracy). Neighbourhood councils are struggling organisations. Dissatisfied with the authority they were attributed, they try to conquer more. But local decision-makers try to keep them relatively weak and, what is even worse, neglect them in decision-making processes as much as they can. The neighbourhood councils, in turn, do not excel in what they should do: to enable citizens in participating in governing processes. In contrast, they show a tendency to imitate the local council, to play representative politics with little active involvement of the citizens. Finally, democratic legitimacy of local government is hardly an issue in processes of regionalisation. It may be recognised as a problem, but few policy-makers develop solutions. Quite surprisingly they may be correct. Regionalisation only affects democratic legitimacy of local government to a small extent.

General conclusions

Not all of the puzzles we formulated in Chapter 1 have been solved. Perhaps this is one of our most important conclusions: effective reform requires constant activity. Very much like the quest for the Holy Grail, the positive value is not the result, the

(impossible) finding the elusive Grail, but rather in the quest itself. There are no final solutions for most of our puzzles. Part of the benefits of democratic reform is not related to its precise nature, but rather to the fact that efforts are made. The positive appreciation of reform often seems related to the activity, not to the result. If this is true the first lesson for democratic learning is that concern with and innovation of local democratic practices is a constant task.

Another important conclusion is that representative democracy, criticised by many with substantial reason, is still the core of local democracy. The representative system itself, so we saw, may be underperforming in some aspects but it is not obsolete. Most reform projects include the representative system in some way, or are even directed at improving representation. This suggests that new forms of democracy are seen as complementary to the representative system, as a repertoire of new practices which can enrich the existing political practice[46]. Within the representative model itself also some elements can be strengthened. Grand results are absent, small results are possible. Revitalisation of representative democracy alone will not, however, save local democracy. Additional measures are possible and necessary. Participation of individual citizens, civil society involvement, direct mayoral elections or alternative kinds of individual political leadership were discussed and found potentially successful. Counter to some expectations[47] they were hardly harmful to the existing representative model and its institutions.

That leads us to a third conclusion. A risk in the search for revitalised local democracy is to treat additional measures as mere instruments, as a method to save the central position of the traditional political institutions, such as the council and its members. That would be a mistake. Tensions between democracy models do exist, although in the practice of local democracy less than expected. The democracy crisis we experience seems to require a sincere reorientation on local democracy in all its aspects. To put it bluntly, simply adding a bit of participation, a bit of direct democracy, a bit of civil society into the menu of local politics as we know it, might not be very credible.

Our fourth conclusion is that it is naïve to believe in "final solutions" for the legitimacy crisis. Rather, local authorities and active citizens should operate on a pragmatic-innovative basis. Local governments are working on a variety of prob-

46 See the three visions on the relationship between participatory and representative democracy, mentioned in Chapter 1.
47 Idem.

lems which, in one way or another, can all be related to what we indicated here as a legitimacy crisis. Different instruments are applied as a consequence of different problem definitions. Nevertheless, they show a lot of inventiveness and creativity in improving local democracy. The results up to now, however, are rather thin. It also becomes clear that there are no success formulas. What works in one context does not necessarily have the same effect in a different context. And what works now, gives no guarantee for success in the future. Also it is possible that the changes considered necessary need more time to take shape.

A word of warning is required here: not everything that is called "democratic reform" deserves the adverb. Some reform efforts mainly focus on more effective forms of service delivery or of neighbourhood management. If we hide the basically managerial character of such reform efforts, we run the risk of neglecting how such efforts in effectiveness and efficiency can go to the detriment of democratic growth. Effectiveness and efficiency are of course valuable in their own right, but neglecting their tension with legitimacy and democracy is a recipe for further erosion of support for the democratic system. It will require much creativity and concern to keep a proper balance between both dimensions of political performance. But selling managerial reform as democratic reform is not the right answer to this dilemmatic challenge.

These observations lead us to the final conclusion. Democratic learning is a dynamic process. Better advice would be to continuously experiment with new ideas and reforms, and to constantly learn from experiments in other municipalities, within and outside the country. Renewal is a process, not an end stage. Society moves on, and so should the practice of local democracy. Elected politicians, councillors, continuing to be the main representatives of the citizenry, are the guardians of this renewal. That is not an easy task. Elected politicians need to redefine their own role. As representatives of the citizenry they are the most visible symbol of the primacy of politics, but the essence of this primacy belongs to the sovereign society. The elected representatives of society need to accept that it is not their task to BE the local democracy, but rather to guarantee its quality.

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